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The Golden Bowl by Henry James has elicited sharply divergent critical reaction, and virtually every modern critic of the book has his unique interpretation which he feels explains the novel. Yet most of these interpretations leave the reader who really wishes to get at the heart of the novel dissatisfied, for most of them fail to take into account the whole of the book, only working out various sections of it.

The key which I believe unlocks the book in its entirety is the concept of ambiguity, which I define as the intermingling of the good and the bad, the selfishness and the unselfishness, within each of the four major characters and their actions and thoughts. Maggie, Adam, Charlotte, and the Prince, each have their greedy and generous facets, their pure and impure motivations, so that we can neither totally admire nor totally dislike any of them, nor can we designate any of them the conventional hero or villain of the novel.

A second type of ambiguity in the novel, which is less pervasive but equally effective, is the concept of unknowability--that is, life is so complex that we cannot know how it will turn out, or even fully know or understand individual actions or motivations. This type of ambiguity is illustrated primarily by the character of Adam Verver, whose motivations we do not and cannot know, and whom consequently we cannot judge. This type of ambiguity is also evident in the ending of the novel, which leaves us entirely uncertain as to what future actions and what chances of happiness are implied for the characters.

It is my belief that James deliberately used these two types of ambiguity in The Golden Bowl, and that he did so because they expressed for him the complexity of life which is richly depicted in all of his

fiction. The intermixture of seemingly opposite qualities or motivations within one character or action, and the unknowability of causes and effects, were truths which James saw from his own experience, and in this last of his complete novels, they may be said to imply his philosophy of life.

Wm. A. D. M.

AMBIGUITY AS A POSITIVE VALUE: THE GOLDEN BOWL BY HENRY JAMES

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by

Susan Andress Singh
"

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INTRODUCTION

Ambiguity is a difficult subject to approach at any time, for it transcends logic. But I think it is especially difficult to approach in Henry James because of the complexity of his works and the near-impossibility of keeping even one work, such as The Golden Bowl, fully and wholly in one's mind at one time. Another difficulty is the fact that I have discovered two types of ambiguity in The Golden Bowl, separate though inter-related. The first type of ambiguity I have found is the intermixture of opposite qualities, good and evil, right and wrong, innocence and guilt, in all four of the main characters of the novel. Neither side of their natures can be said to cancel out or "triumph" over the other; both sides remain at the end. This conception of ambiguity differs somewhat from that of William Empson: Empson examines the combination of two or more merely different meanings in a piece of language; I am concerned with the combining of opposite, seemingly incompatible meanings or ideas, and over much greater blocks of space than Empson's words, phrases, sentences, or stanzas. The second type of ambiguity I have discovered is the deliberately unresolved state about a person or situation, in which evidence is given for both opposite interpretations. This state of deliberate non-resolution makes it impossible to reach finite or rigid conclusions about either the personalities of the characters, or about the implications of the novel's open ending. It is illustrated primarily by Adam Verver--though to a certain extent it is in the other

characters as well--and by the extremely uncertain situation at the end of the book. As I see it, the book can only be understood as a whole through an understanding of both of these types of ambiguity.

James, I believe, was aware of ambiguity, for it is not only in his works but in his life. Leon Edel, James' biographer, describes the love and jealousy Henry felt simultaneously for his elder brother William. There is the conflict, which one can see in his notebooks and letters, that Henry had between the demands and rewards of society and those of art, and the ambivalence he felt about how much he could participate in each. And, of course, there is the whole question of America and Europe. It never bothered James to live in Europe and think of himself as an American, until a year before he died, when his anguish at America's refusal to enter World War I to help Britain drove him to become an English citizen. Theodora Bosanquet, James' secretary in later years, said James neither looked nor spoke like an American or an Englishman:

Would it have been possible to fit him confidently into any single category? He had reacted with so much success against both the American accent and the English manner that he seemed only doubtfully Anglo-Saxon. He might perhaps have been an eminent cardinal in mufti, or even a Roman senator amusing himself by playing the part of a Sussex squire. . . . His features were all cast in the classical mould of greatness. He might very well have been a merciful Caesar or a benevolent Napoleon, and a painter who worked at his portrait a year or two later was excusably reminded of so many illustrious makers of history that he declared it to be a hard task to isolate the individual character of the model.¹

¹ Theodora Bosanquet, Henry James at Work (London: Hogarth Press, 1927), pp. 4-5.

From this description it seems clear that James himself must have possessed something of the very ambiguity I am speaking of in The Golden Bowl.

A few remarks about my methods are in order. I have quoted extensively from the book because one really cannot handle The Golden Bowl in any other way. It is so long and complex that to deal with it by making abstract generalizations would lead only to confusion. Specific passages simply must be analyzed for nuances and overtones. Yet even some critics who do quote extensively make serious errors: attributing a thought to the wrong person's point of view; forgetting the place in the book a certain thought or action took place, and therefore losing the awareness of what has come before it and what is yet to come; missing things entirely; or misrepresenting, unintentionally, the feel and tone of a passage as a result of not thinking of it in its context.

I have also quoted critics a great deal, especially in the first and fourth chapters, because my own points will be clearer, I think, when seen in the perspective of general critical comment on the book. The sheer quantity of critical writing on The Golden Bowl means that many of my own ideas coincide with those which critics have already expressed. My own configuration of ideas and interpretations, however, is original, and this, too, I hope my quotations of other critics will make clear. On the whole, my interpretation is closer to that of Dorothea Krook than to anyone else, though there are several crucial points on which I differ with her. Also, I believe I have been the first to clarify the many meanings of the term "ambiguity" as it is used by critics of James, and to distinguish and define precisely the two types which I do see in this novel. The first is similar to that

perceived by Miss Krook, i.e., that James intended it to depict the simultaneous existence of the dark and light sides of life, and that it thereby has positive value. I believe, however, I have amplified and clarified her discussion of its use in the novel, as well as downright disagreeing with her on major points within the general theory. The second type of ambiguity I discuss (non-resolution) has been perceived by a few critics, notably John Bayley and Tony Tanner, although not always in connection with this novel and not always fully articulated. Non-resolution has not before, however, been seen as a type of ambiguity.

In my first chapter I have given the basic critical positions on the novel and also what the critics have to say about James' "ambiguity." I then discuss my own definition of ambiguity. In the second and third chapters I examine Charlotte and the Prince, and Maggie and Mr. Verver, trying to show, respectively, "the innocence in the guilt" and "the guilt in the innocence." I also indicate in these two chapters examples of the second type of ambiguity--the impossibility of knowing. As Charlotte and the Prince are conventionally interpreted as the immoral characters and Maggie and Mr. Verver the moral, I have dwelt little on these sides of them, but rather on their other, opposite, sides. In the last chapter I discuss how both types of ambiguity combine in the ending of the book, how we are to interpret the end and what the book means. Once more I bring in the critics to clarify, by similarity and by contrast, my own points. The reader is referred to the plot summary of The Golden Bowl in the Appendix, especially to the direct quotation of the last few paragraphs of the novel, essential for Chapter IV.

CHAPTER I

THE CRITICS

Critical opinion is almost by definition sharply divided on any issue, but in the case of The Golden Bowl, it is even more extreme. There are two diametrically opposed interpretations of the novel, though of course there are many variations within each larger viewpoint. Basically, critics tend either to love Maggie and Adam Verver and despise Charlotte and the Prince for their diabolical attempt to thwart the former's happiness; or they dislike Maggie and Adam, consider them the villains, and feel Charlotte and the Prince are the real hero and heroine who are worked upon by the others. The critical situation becomes even more unusual when we realize that good cases can be made for both sides of the argument, and that evidence can be cited from the novel to support either case. I believe the division of opinion to be caused not by critical perversity alone, but by the nature of the novel itself. In the book the struggle between the forces of good and evil is fairly equally balanced throughout, and good and evil qualities are conjoined in each character. For any good one finds in a character, one can find a corresponding evil, and vice versa. Also, at the end neither good nor evil has made any kind of permanent triumph or victory.

Critics, evidently unable to accept this duality or ambiguity, opt for either the good or the evil and try to read the entire book only on those terms. Most critics want either to like or to dislike each

character, whereas James actually deals with them all sympathetically, while at the same time demonstrating that they all have their serious faults. The very fact of these two opposite readings and the fact that each can be supported--the very fact of this disagreement among critics, then--is proof itself of the ambiguity which exists as part of the fabric of The Golden Bowl.

A few critics are aware of the conflicting views on this novel and of the fact that evidence can be found for either side.¹ Walter F. Wright noting it, asks, "Since we can lift sentences from the novel to support either extreme, what are we to believe?"² Once one truly realizes this, the only conclusion, as he sees, is that James "was doing something much greater in scope, which encompassed both extremes. There is very great evil in The Golden Bowl, but there is also wondrous good. . . .The evil and the good are not typified by separate characters; they exist in each."³ Frederick Crews concurs: "Any critic who has found one point of view completely vindicated is guilty of carelessness, for The Golden Bowl simply does not lend itself to . . . unilateral interpretation."⁴ Sallie Sears is another who realizes this: "The same people are viewed at one and the same time with love and with hatred, with sympathy and with aversion, with pity and with dread.

¹ See, for example, A. R. Gard, "Critics of The Golden Bowl," Melbourne Critical Review, 6 (1963), 105.

² Walter F. Wright, The Madness of Art (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), p. 243.

³ Wright, p. 243.

⁴ Frederick C. Crews, The Tragedy of Manners (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 82.

This is why the novel continually eludes the grasp of readers desiring, or expecting, an autonomous vision and helps to account for the violently opposed interpretations given of it."⁵

The basic critical views are relatively simple. On the one hand are those who see Maggie as a "redeemer" or a "savior," or at least a very good young woman, fighting against evil in the form of her husband's adultery with Charlotte, and triumphing. They feel that Charlotte and Amerigo have done a terrible thing, and that Charlotte deserves the punishment she gets at the end. On the other hand, some critics see Maggie and her father as representatives of certain unsavory, even evil, elements of life, with the Prince's and Charlotte's passion the only healthy, wholesome thing in the book. These critics often feel that James unjustly gives the victory to the evil side--i.e., Maggie. Some critics believe that James meant for us to interpret the novel the way the first group of critics does, but that the way he actually wrote it, we are forced to the second interpretation. It is usually members of this last group who feel that in this last novel James had lost his moral touch.⁶

I think the only manageable way to deal with the body of criticism on the novel is to take each of the four major characters, one at a time, and look at the main critical comments on him or her. This method

⁵ Sallie Sears, The Negative Imagination (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), pp. 168-69.

⁶ For instance: F. O. Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963); Rebecca West, Henry James (New York: Henry Holt, 1916); F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948); Ferner Nuhn, The Wind Blew from the East (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1942).

will be more lucid, I hope, than attempting to keep straight in our minds what a given critic thinks about all four characters at once and the novel as a whole. The basic critical positions, as stated in the paragraph above, should help to place the following individual comments in perspective. Let us look first at Maggie and Adam, then at Charlotte and the Prince.

Maggie

On the positive side, R. P. Blackmur sees Maggie as the personification of love: she is "as near the exemplar as James could come to our lady of theology or divine wisdom; she is James' creation nearest to Dante's Beatrice, stern and full of charity, the rock itself but all compassion, . . . not exactly lovable but herself love."⁷ However, he believes James was ultimately unsuccessful in creating her thus, that she was "a more tremendous image" than he could work out. It is simply too "hard to turn a lamb into a sovereign . . . among the lions."⁸

C. B. Cox is another early defender of Maggie: he believes she "exemplifies James's ideal of self-control and intelligence."⁹ He feels the selfishness she is accused of by other critics is justifiable on the grounds that she does not want to lose her husband.¹⁰ Bruce R. McElderry, Jr. believes Maggie exercises "almost superhuman restraint

⁷ R. P. Blackmur, "The Loose and Baggy Monsters of Henry James," *Accent*, 11 (Summer 1951), 136.

⁸ Blackmur, p. 137.

⁹ C. B. Cox, "The Golden Bowl," *Essays in Criticism*, 5 (April 1955), 193.

¹⁰ Cox, p. 193.

and decorum,"¹¹ though he recognizes that her "sweet, compliant nature is shown to have its devious, unlovely sides" as well, which he proceeds to list.¹² But he points out that Maggie does lose her father and Charlotte, as well as gain her husband and the solution to her problem.

Perhaps the most important defender of Maggie is Dorothea Krook, who sees her as a "savior" or "redeemer." Through the power of her love, Maggie transforms the "aesthetic" into the "moral" in her husband, but rather than doing this directly, she only starts the chain of events, and lets the Prince do the rest himself: Maggie first makes him "conscious . . . of his condition of moral turpitude," then she "lets his knowledge of good and evil grow of itself," while she watches and waits "silently and in anguish."¹³ Miss Krook realizes, however, that James raises serious doubts as to the motives of the Ververs, and she feels this to be his ambiguity and his method of showing the dark side of life. She really does not make clear, though, whether we are to take Maggie as savior and devil simultaneously, or whether the two aspects of her are to be taken as alternative, separate meanings illustrating James' sense of the "mixed motive of all human action."¹⁴ This is rather a difficult point to grasp, but the way Miss Krook speaks of the disagreeable aspects of Maggie, they do not seem to be part of this same girl as savior;

¹¹ Bruce R. McElderry, Jr., Henry James (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1965), pp. 139-40.

¹² McElderry, p. 140.

¹³ Dorothea Krook, The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), pp. 128-29.

¹⁴ Krook, p. 319.

they are not, in other words, combined in the same fictional character. The two sets of qualities seem to be alternatives in Maggie as a person, they are alternative readings, as it were, and come together at no point. Miss Krook seems to believe they come together not in the concrete Maggie but in the abstract, in James' final theme of ambiguity and mixture. Yet his ambiguity really does not make much sense this way. Mixture is not really illustrated by alternative meanings which are only to be combined theoretically and out of the context of the actual characters. If Maggie is not "good" and "bad" it is hard to see how she is ambiguous.

Naomi Lebowitz, another important critic of James, agrees with Miss Krook that Maggie is a "saviour"¹⁵ who is forced to assume the role of the princess in the fairy tale who transforms the frog back into a prince. Maggie as working in "the metamorphic state" must risk a great deal, including "the use of deliberate lies and illusive appearances for the sake of reality."¹⁶ Thus Mrs. Lebowitz believes she has found a solution for the problem of Maggie's lies and deceptions, without thereby tarnishing her "goodness." Quentin Anderson, too, speaks of the "redemption" in The Golden Bowl,¹⁷ and of the suffering unto death which Maggie must endure.¹⁸ Caroline Gordon's view is similar to the above three: she sees Maggie as the embodiment of "caritas", Christian

¹⁵ Naomi Lebowitz, The Imagination of Loving (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965), p. 141.

¹⁶ Lebowitz, p. 132.

¹⁷ Quentin Anderson, The American Henry James (London: John Calder, 1958), p. 279.

¹⁸ Anderson, p. 336.

charity."¹⁹

Walter Wright takes what might be called a middle stand between the view which would have Maggie a saint and that which calls her a witch: he says she is neither, but "simply . . . a wholesome, sensitive, ignorant girl."²⁰ He, like Cox, finds her selfishness normal. He believes that her bad qualities are due to immaturity and ignorance, and are banished during her struggle. Though he spends quite a time discussing these bad qualities, his idea that they disappear at the end is not substantiated by the evidence of the book itself. His interpretation also does not account for the really insidious light in which Maggie's faults are made to appear. Wright's reading is admired by some who are tired of the main controversy of the book and feel this solves it, but actually he is trying to reconcile things which cannot be reconciled, and explain away aspects of the novel which insist on remaining in our minds.

Many more critics point out Maggie's flaws than her virtues. The classic attack on her is by Joseph J. Firebaugh. He calls her an "all but unmitigated tyrant," a "heartless Machiavellian absolutist," and a manipulator.²¹ He sees her as purely selfish; her machinations are "for ownership and for power, for the preservation of a preconceived idea."²² He believes Charlotte and the Prince are in this novel the

¹⁹ Caroline Gordon, "Mr. Verver, Our National Hero," Sewanee Review, 63 (January 1955), 40.

²⁰ Walter Wright, "Maggie Verver: Neither Saint Nor Witch," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 12 (June 1957), 64.

²¹ Joseph J. Firebaugh, "The Ververs," Essays in Criticism, 4 (October 1954), 401, 406, 404 respectively.

²² Firebaugh, p. 409.

embodiments of passion, which James wishes to represent as the good. In depicting Maggie and Adam, he goes on, James is attacking his upper-class society. Firebaugh sees no positive side whatsoever to Maggie and Adam. Though his view is as simplistic as its opposite, and like it only half right, Firebaugh brings out the important point that Maggie's primary devotion throughout the novel--up to the very end--is to her father. She wishes to keep her husband, but not at any price--she picks only methods which will enable her to keep the knowledge of what is really happening from her father.²³ This devotion to her father is something which ultimately becomes very repulsive to us. Another outstanding critic opposing Maggie and Adam is F. R. Leavis, who differs from Firebaugh in believing James meant us to have unqualified sympathy with the Americans but drew them in such a way that we cannot. We will examine what he says about Charlotte and the Prince shortly.

Sallie Sears also has a negative view of Maggie; contrary to Miss Krook's reading, she feels that Maggie "moves too much in paths of darkness to be credible as a creature of glory and beatitude."²⁴ The "destruction and retribution" she is responsible for are out of proportion to "the just claims of outraged innocence."²⁵ Her manipulation and hypocrisy are selfish. Miss Sears believes that Maggie is "sado-masochistic" in her manipulation of others and her own hypocrisy.²⁶

²³ Firebaugh, p. 401.

²⁴ Sears, p. 171.

²⁵ Sears, p. 171.

²⁶ Sears, pp. 210, 219. S. Gorley Putt, Henry James: A Reader's Guide (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), p. 376, seems to have been the first in labeling Maggie's "masochism."

That critic also believes Maggie's values are ultimately corrupted, because of the lying and other hypocrisy she performs. This is how Miss Sears can come to her conclusion that "good" and "evil" become ultimately "interchangeable" in this book.²⁷

D. W. Jefferson points out that Maggie can say the most appalling things "with her absurd frankness and freshness: James gets away with it."²⁸ (He fails to see, however, that this fact may be part of James' intended ambiguity.) Maggie becomes awkward for us because "the reader is expected to admire her, it seems, on certain occasions when she is more likely either to embarrass or to alienate."²⁹ Maggie's and Adam's innocence is described well by R. W. B. Lewis in his book on innocence in nineteenth century American fiction, The American Adam: "James saw very deeply--and he was the first American writer to do so--that innocence could be cruel as well as vulnerable; that the condition prior to conscience might have insidious undertones of the amoral as well as the beguiling naiveté of the pre-moral."³⁰ Jean Kimball notes that through Maggie, we see that "simplicity may be brutal as well as sweet," and that childhood contains "cruelty . . . hand in hand with the sweetness."³¹ Though Elizabeth Owen justifies Maggie, she admits that "there is indeed

²⁷ Sears, p. 222.

²⁸ D. W. Jefferson, Henry James (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1965), p. 91

²⁹ D. W. Jefferson, Henry James and the Modern Reader (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964), p. 222.

³⁰ R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 154.

³¹ Jean Kimball, "Henry James' Last Portrait of a Lady: Charlotte Stant in The Golden Bowl," American Literature, 28 (January 1957), 463.

guilt in Maggie and Adam's innocence."³² This quality in Maggie is also labelled by Holland "culpable innocence,"³³ Bowden describes it as a "moral weakness,"³⁴ and Crews comments on Maggie's nearly "positive willfulness of ignorance."³⁵ Crews also notes that "at the end she is scarcely human at all,"³⁶ though he believes that ultimately she performs a good, and while learning how to live, comes to accept the good and the bad in people.³⁷

Oscar Cargill calls Maggie "emotionally obtuse,"³⁸ and demonstrates the untenability of Anderson, Barzun, Blackmur, and Krook, who think of Maggie as virtually perfect.³⁹ He believes, however, that ultimately Maggie triumphs through the growing-up her struggle involves. He believes that she can forgive her husband because she recognizes her own faults (yet nowhere in the book is it clear that she actually forgives him). She abides by him rather than walking out on him, not for her own sake alone but for that of the other three as well. Maggie bothers S. Gorley Putt, who labels her "perverse": he says she is determined to suffer no matter what, in a "'heads-you-win, tails-I-lose' toss-up of

³² Elizabeth Owen, "'The Given Appearance' of Charlotte Verver," Essays In Criticism, 13 (October 1963), 372.

³³ Laurence B. Holland, The Expense of Vision (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 379.

³⁴ Edwin T. Bowden, The Themes of Henry James (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), p. 113.

³⁵ Crews, p. 99.

³⁶ Crews, p. 105.

³⁷ Crews, pp. 104-05.

³⁸ Oscar Cargill, The Novels of Henry James (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. 399.

³⁹ Cargill, p. 403.

emotional alternatives."⁴⁰ He believes that her actions are not even a question of forgiveness or redemption, but "sheer superior diplomacy."⁴¹

Ferner Nuhn is an excellent example of what James' ambiguity can do to a critic who refuses to accept it and insists on seeing only one side at a time. Nuhn actually changes his point of view imperceptibly during the course of his long discussion on James, so that his position at the end of the chapter becomes the opposite of that at the beginning. At first Nuhn calls Maggie a "savior" working "redemption";⁴² he was perhaps the first critic to speak of her in these terms. He senses James' ambiguity, however, and we can see it making him uncertain: "How are we to take this creature [Maggie] at once so otherworldly and so ambitious, so innocent and so 'deep,' so mild and so formidable? . . . We find ourselves in the deepest thickets of James's ambiguity."⁴³ But Nuhn cannot accept ambiguity as a positive value, the unresolved state of "bothness" which James presented; he reverses himself, and posits: "Maggie . . . might turn out instead to be the bad witch."⁴⁴ Maggie is the villain, and Nuhn feels Charlotte needs a third volume in the book to wreak her revenge on "that crafty-innocent, smugly virtuous, coolly victorious little Princess."⁴⁵

Robert Marks has such a negative reaction toward Maggie that he dreams up an entirely unique interpretation, according to which Adam

⁴⁰ Putt, p. 374.

⁴¹ Putt, p. 381.

⁴² Nuhn, p. 128.

⁴³ Nuhn, p. 132.

⁴⁴ Nuhn, p. 133.

⁴⁵ Nuhn, p. 137.

gradually comes really to love Charlotte, and Maggie tries desperately and jealously to get her father back. She fabricates her husband's infidelity in a desperate (though unconscious) attempt to regain her father, which fails.⁴⁶ Though there is evidence that Maggie is jealous of Charlotte, especially toward the end, and of course much to support the idea that she hangs on to her father, this reading is not supported by the whole of the book. Again, however, its existence is simply proof that the negative side to Maggie really exists.

Adam

Caroline Gordon admires Adam greatly: she sees him as "the spiritual ancestor of the philanthropists of our day"⁴⁷ and completely "superior to the average man" because of his "moral power."⁴⁸ She believes he is actually our "national hero" in the tradition of St. George, conquering and subduing the "monster," Charlotte.⁴⁹ Miss Krook believes he represents the "Just God" (Maggie is the "Loving God"), though she speaks of his "curious philistinism."⁵⁰

John Bayley takes a sort of middle position between the admirers and opponents of Adam. He calls the man a "visionary figure," James' "fantasy figure"--what James would have liked the American millionaire

⁴⁶ Robert Marks, James's Later Novels (New York: William-Frederick Press, 1960), pp. 119, 129.

⁴⁷ Gordon, p. 35.

⁴⁸ Gordon, p. 42.

⁴⁹ Gordon, p. 44.

⁵⁰ Krook, pp. 286, 252.

as a type to be.⁵¹ But Bayley realizes the discrepancy between this and Verver as an actual personality is too great, and he feels it is this which "makes him strike us as a monster."⁵²

The opponents of Adam are vociferous. High on the list of his faults is his "aestheticism," which several critics take as a lack of humanism or an inability to form personal relationships. Bowden, for instance, describes Mr. Verver's "replacement of human and even spiritual values with the esthetic," and goes on to say, "The wall of esthetics and taste which he has erected between himself and the full tide of life is impenetrable."⁵³ Ruth Taylor Todasco believes that Adam demonstrates "the aridity of existence that results from complete absorption in aesthetic . . . forms,"⁵⁴ and as such is a representative of one approach to life which James meant to condemn. Alan Rose believes that people and art alike are regarded by Adam and Maggie as "use objects" rather than "love objects," as good not in themselves but for some purpose.⁵⁵ Jean Kimball makes a good point when she mentions Mr. Verver's resemblance to that insidious aesthete of The Portrait of a Lady, Gilbert Osmond.⁵⁶ Though I do not think the resemblance can be

⁵¹ John Bayley, The Characters of Love (New York: Basic Books, 1960), pp. 249, 253.

⁵² Bayley, p. 249.

⁵³ Bowden, p. 104.

⁵⁴ Ruth Taylor Todasco, "Theme and Imagery in The Golden Bowl," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 4 (Summer 1962) 235.

⁵⁵ Alan Rose, "The Spatial Form of The Golden Bowl," Modern Fiction Studies, 12 (Spring 1966), 105.

⁵⁶ Kimball, p. 454.

taken so far as to make Mr. Verver the "villain" of the novel, as Osmond is, nevertheless his aestheticism is complete enough to count as one of his negative or "evil" qualities.⁵⁷

One critic who does see Adam Verver as "something of the villain" of the novel is Christof Wegelin.⁵⁸ He believes that Adam represents "the American irresponsibility toward Europe" and must be "purged" from the union of America and Europe that Maggie and Amerigo's marriage represents.⁵⁹ He "is part of Maggie's immaturity and represents a stage in the American relation to Europe" which must be transcended in order for the fusion of Maggie and the Prince to take place.⁶⁰ I do not think this theory really holds up, however, because of the very fact that Maggie does find it so hard to let her father go. She hardly "purges" him from her life. Also, it is open to question whether Maggie and Amerigo have attained such a perfect "fusion" at the end as Wegelin suggests. Mrs. Lebowitz takes the similar position that Adam and Charlotte must be banished from Maggie's Eden--that second Eden, which she works hard to achieve, and in which there is room for no one else save Amerigo.⁶¹ Other than this, however, Mrs. Lebowitz has no particular objection to Adam Verver.

⁵⁷ We must not be drawn into the fallacious thinking, Bayley correctly notes, pp. 223-24, that aestheticism is necessarily inhuman.

⁵⁸ Christof Wegelin, The Image of Europe in Henry James (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1958), p. 122.

⁵⁹ Wegelin, p. 122.

⁶⁰ Wegelin, p. 126.

⁶¹ Lebowitz, p. 136.

D. W. Jefferson notes that the Ververs are seen by some critics as "symbols of goodness," by others as "examples of the emotional and moral inadequacy of the American plutocrat."⁶² It seems to be largely their great wealth that bothers us in this connection: "James multiplies and inflates and embellishes his images of wealth. . . . There is an element of effrontery in it."⁶³ With so much power and money behind them, it is hard for us not to consider them rather insidious. As Jefferson says, "It seems unfortunate . . . that victory should be so manifestly with those who have power to arrange everything as they wish."⁶⁴ The little English church which Mr. Verver would like to ship intact to American City is too much like the later actions of Vanderbilts and other tycoons for us to have much sympathy with him.

Joseph J. Firebaugh, who is of course trying to prove the bad or evil side of Maggie and Adam, calls the latter "cold, inhuman and inadequate,"⁶⁵ and this is rather the way he comes across from our scant first-hand knowledge of him. Firebaugh believes that both Maggie and Adam have the qualities of the tyrant, which he goes on to enumerate.⁶⁶

Charlotte

Elizabeth Owen believes Charlotte to be "clever, dangerous and brilliantly evil," and that her actions justify Maggie's relish "of

⁶² Jefferson, Henry James, p. 90.

⁶³ Jefferson, p. 91.

⁶⁴ Jefferson, p. 111.

⁶⁵ Firebaugh, p. 401.

⁶⁶ Firebaugh, p. 402.

her . . . powers of attack" against Charlotte.⁶⁷ C. B. Cox's interpretation is similar: Charlotte is wrongly sympathized with, and to too great an extent, simply because of the punishment she gets. He believes her to be an "egoist," and feels that James made her sin much greater than Maggie's guilt for what the latter is forced to do to Charlotte.⁶⁸ Miss Krook correctly points out Charlotte's and Amerigo's "pity that is so close to contempt" for Maggie and Adam, and their "co-operation in this cruel benevolence" towards Maggie.⁶⁹ Oscar Cargill believes Charlotte, along with the Prince, is "amoral" rather than deliberately wicked, but because she is more cosmopolitan and more sophisticated than Amerigo, her amorality is worse.⁷⁰

On the positive side, Crews correctly notes that most of the time our sympathy is with Charlotte.⁷¹ Even Maxwell Giesmar recognizes that she is very attractive in the early portions of the book.⁷² These and other considerations lead Miss Krook to recognize "the double-view we are ultimately expected to take of the case of Charlotte Stant."⁷³ Jean Kimball is so impressed with Charlotte that she believes James intended her to be the unselfish and suffering heroine of the book. Miss

⁶⁷ Owen, p. 373.

⁶⁸ Cox, all on p. 192.

⁶⁹ Dorothea Krook, "The Golden Bowl," The Cambridge Journal, 7 (September 1954), 723.

⁷⁰ Cargill, p. 394.

⁷¹ Crews, pp. 108, 110.

⁷² Maxwell Giesmar, Henry James and the Jacobites (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), p. 308.

⁷³ Krook, The Ordeal, p. 308.

Kimball gathers rather impressive evidence that Charlotte physically resembles Minny Temple, James' cousin who died young and with whom there is evidence he was in love. As Minny is generally thought by critics to be drawn in the portrait of Isabel Archer (in The Portrait of a Lady) and almost certainly in Milly Theale (in The Wings of the Dove), Minny's portrait in Charlotte would rank the latter with at least two of James' greatest heroines. Miss Kimball sees Charlotte's task as taking Maggie away from her father in order to save both marriages. Her argument is interesting but not convincing when one considers the book as a whole. Again, it stems from a reading of only half of the book--in this case, the undercurrent, the implied meaning. Though her argument is ultimately incorrect, its existence is evidence of the positive side of Charlotte. Oscar Cargill sums up her positive qualities well as "the singleness . . . of her heart, her poverty and its imposed limitations of choice, her undeniable courage, and her persuasive charm."⁷⁴ She is also, in most of Book I at least, full of good faith and, intermittently, honesty.

The Prince

Oscar Cargill believes that the Prince, like Charlotte, is "not corrupt but amoral," not "wicked," but "uninstructed," naive in his morals, as it were.⁷⁵ Along these lines, James Southall Wilson comments that the Prince is not conscious of evil in himself or others as long as the outward decencies are observed and no one seems to be hurt--until

⁷⁴ Cargill, pp. 395-96.

⁷⁵ Cargill, pp. 390, 393.

Maggie educates him.⁷⁶ Cargill believes the Prince possesses one important quality, "the empathy that is the basis of all ethical conduct"; this is what makes him "redeemable."⁷⁷ F. O. Matthiessen is correct that James views the Prince sympathetically throughout the book,⁷⁸ but it should be noted that James treats all four major characters with large quantities of sympathy at various times. James loved his characters as people whether or not he agreed with their morals.⁷⁹

Bowden correctly makes the point that the Prince honestly believes he has acted in "good faith," "for both he and Charlotte have tried not simply to hide the affair from the others, but also to protect and please them."⁸⁰ These good intentions of the Prince must be seen in relation to his moral naiveté mentioned above. Connected with this is the Prince's belief that his vow with Charlotte truly makes their situation together all right. Marks goes so far as to assert that it is a misreading of Amerigo to call him inconstant, cynical, amoral: he "is, profoundly, a Prince; all his conduct expresses it."⁸¹ He believes that James deliberately allows the Prince's real characteristics to be misread and that he is not guilty of any wrongs whatsoever since his marriage, but

⁷⁶ James S. Wilson, "Henry James and Herman Melville," Virginia Quarterly Review, 21 (Spring 1945), 283.

⁷⁷ Cargill, p. 393.

⁷⁸ Matthiessen, p. 95.

⁷⁹ See Bayley's comments on this, pp. 214-15, 217, 254; also James' own words on this, James on Balzac, and James on Stevenson, both quoted in Bayley p. 253.

⁸⁰ Bowden, p. 110.

⁸¹ Marks, p. 117.

Marks' argument does not stand up to the evidence of the entire book.

Some critics are attracted, whereas others are repelled, by the Prince's and Charlotte's love affair. F. R. Leavis, in his oft-quoted opinion, says, "If our sympathies are anywhere they are with Charlotte and (a little) the Prince, who represent what, against the general moral background of the book, can only strike us as decent passion; in a stale, sickly and oppressive atmosphere they represent life."⁸² J. I. M. Stewart agrees: "It is easy to feel the consummated physical passion of Charlotte and her former lover . . . as more wholesome than either of the book's marriages."⁸³ On the other hand, Miss Krook finds Charlotte's and the Prince's relationship "stale" and "middle-aged"⁸⁴ and believes it is one of lust rather than love.⁸⁵ Bayley believes that their love is based on acting, and as such, "It cannot come to good."⁸⁶ He realizes, however, perhaps more than any critic, the ambiguity of that relationship. The acting is "a sign of corruption" but also demands our sympathy for its "splendour and pathos."⁸⁷ Bayley points out the undeniable fact that "even their acting has its high and good side"⁸⁸--for instance, in the last scene.⁸⁹

⁸² Leavis, p. 160.

⁸³ J. I. M. Stewart, Eight Modern Writers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 114.

⁸⁴ Krook, The Ordeal, pp. 287-90.

⁸⁵ Krook, p. 254.

⁸⁶ Bayley, p. 226.

⁸⁷ Bayley, p. 225.

⁸⁸ Bayley, p. 233.

⁸⁹ See the end of the Prince's section in Chapter III of this study for more discussion of this relationship.

Ambiguity

As the critics have multiple and conflicting views on the characters, so they have them about the concept of ambiguity. Ambiguity is a term which is frequently used by critics about James, but not always very clearly defined. In trying to track down the beginnings of the popular application of this term to James, I think I have pretty definitely traced it to Edmund Wilson's famous article, "The Ambiguity of Henry James,"⁹⁰ though I am not necessarily trying to state that he was the first ever to apply the term to James. Wilson's essay is a somewhat rambling examination of James' works and his life, and he deals at more length with "The Turn of the Screw" than with any other single work. Wilson sees the ambiguity in James' work as neither intentional nor valuable; rather, he feels it hinders the reader from understanding and is the result of James' own uncertainty.

Many critics since have used the term without defining it clearly or have used it to mean different things. I think an attempt to untangle these varying meanings would be enlightening, for it would make clear my own interpretation of "ambiguity," besides indicating the verbal and conceptual battle the critics are fighting. There has really never been a survey on this subject, and I think one is needed. Some critics use the term in essentially the same way Wilson meant it. J. I. M. Stewart is one of these, and his argument is typical of those who use it in a negative, uncomplimentary sense. He believes it is a "problem of judgment and allegiance" between America and Europe for

⁹⁰ Edmund Wilson, "The Ambiguity of Henry James" (1934-38), pp. 160-90 in F. W. Dupee, ed., The Question of Henry James (New York: H. Holt, 1945).

James, an inability "to make up his mind on people and systems," a matter of "leaving vital matters open to alternative interpretations" because he could not solve or decide them himself.⁹¹

Jean Frantz Blackall's use of ambiguity in her book-length discussion of James' controversial novel The Sacred Fount is like Wilson's in that she believes it is unintentional and therefore not sound artistically. Rather than attribute it to James' uncertainty, however, she believes it is simply the result of the discrepancy between James' initial concept of this and all his late works, and the actual development of the works. The reader senses the opposing currents and is confused by not knowing how to place them.⁹²

Ferner Nuhn has a fascinating, if untenable, definition of James' ambiguity, though most of the time he uses the word with no clear referent (see my text p. 15). To him it seems to mean James' deliberate cultivation of mystery and wizardry.⁹³ He actually believes it is due to the "separation of idea and experience" in James' life, that it explains, for instance, how James could retain his American citizenship (the "idea") while living in England (the "experience").⁹⁴ Nuhn here illustrates very well the almost pathological refusal of many critics to consider the possibility that James could "choose both."

⁹¹ Stewart, p. 74.

⁹² Jean Frantz Blackall, Jamesian Ambiguity and 'The Sacred Fount' (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), especially pp. 158-60.

⁹³ Nuhn, pp. 141-42.

⁹⁴ Nuhn, p. 142.

I think that by far the most common meaning attached to James' ambiguity is simply the existence of different critical interpretations. This is how F. R. Leavis uses the term.⁹⁵ "James' famous ambiguity" is a term often invoked whenever a critic is having some difficulty--in deciding what James meant, in deciding between opposing critical positions. Then the book is called ambiguous--i.e., not possessing any kind of discernible meaning--when really the problem seems to be that the critic himself is confused. This type of ambiguity--i.e., confusion--belongs much more to the critics than to James.⁹⁶ For Caroline Mercer, ambiguity in the book is simply its "impenetrable" quality, i.e., its unclearness.⁹⁷

There are several more specialized meanings attached to James' ambiguity. For Sallie Sears ambiguity in The Golden Bowl seems to be the fact that we share in both the Prince's and Maggie's view of events, and consequently their "worlds" or "values." She sees the duality in the book simply as a result of this double point of view.⁹⁸ This is a valuable comment, but it explains only part of the ambiguity. It is true that we have sympathy first with the Prince, then with Maggie, because we are respectively "in" their minds, but this does not explain the positive and negative qualities of all of the characters, nor does it clarify the ending. I think James' use of the dual point of view is

⁹⁵ F. R. Leavis in Marius Bewley, The Complex Fate (New York: Gordian Press, 1967), p. 117.

⁹⁶ Marks, p. 10; Alan Friedman, The Turn of the Novel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 26; Nuhn, pp. 129, 132, 136, 138, 144, 158.

⁹⁷ Caroline G. Mercer, "Adam Verver, Yankee Businessman," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 22 (December 1967), 265.

⁹⁸ Sears, pp. 181-82.

is just one of his methods of getting across the larger ambiguity.

Joseph Warren Beach is one of the few who recognizes the confusion attached to James' "ambiguity."⁹⁹ He feels he solves the problem by deciding that it was not James but his characters who "were uncertain in their moral touch."¹⁰⁰ This really does not, however, solve the problem at all unless we decide how James felt about his characters and what he intended the meaning of the book to be.

Crews has an interesting if not quite tenable interpretation of James' ambiguity: he believes it is one of the actual themes of the book--i.e., that colossal misunderstandings take place among the characters.¹⁰¹ But he never explains why James would have chosen this theme, or what it is to mean for the reader. Crews only confuses the issue when he speaks of James' "lifelong devotion to ambiguity for its own sake"¹⁰² without giving us any indication of what he means by this.

Marius Bewley also has an interesting interpretation of ambiguity: he finds it to be James' way of revealing the discrepancy between appearance and reality, though he feels that, in The Golden Bowl and "The Turn of the Screw" especially, the method is not successful. In these two works, he goes on, appearance and reality are pulled apart and the reader is confused; in order to be successful, it is necessary somehow to correlate appearance and reality. Because there is ultimately no

⁹⁹ Joseph Warren Beach, The Method of Henry James (Philadelphia: Albert Saifer, 1954), p. lxxvi.

¹⁰⁰ Beach, p. lxxvi.

¹⁰¹ Crews, p. 81.

¹⁰² Crews, p. 82.

absolute "reality" behind appearances, the message can never become clear to the reader.¹⁰³

There is another entirely different concept attached to the word "ambiguity" and it is this which is most important for us here, because I feel it to be the only method by which the whole book can be taken into account and made sense of. Dorothea Krook is this concept's most eloquent spokesman, though she somewhat weakens her point, in my opinion, by over-extending Maggie's good side to make her the "redeemer." Aside from this, however, she sees the "ambiguity" of The Golden Bowl and "The Turn of the Screw" as deliberate on James' part and sees that it enriches these works by forcing the reader to accept both of two seemingly contradictory meanings. James wanted us to feel the co-existence of good and evil, according to Miss Krook, neither cancelling out the other, but both remaining intact. This co-existence causes the ending of the tale (and the novel as well) to be neither tragic nor triumphant, but a mixture of both, and shows James' view of life to be neither optimistic nor pessimistic, but what can perhaps be called realistic or "pragmatic."¹⁰⁴ In other words, James accepts "both" aspects of life, not choosing "either" one side "or" the other to emphasize. The four major characters in this novel each contain about equal amounts of "good" and "evil" or "faults" and "virtues"; and whatever the explicit meaning indicates, the implicit meaning shows the opposite. As she says:

¹⁰³ Bewley, The Complex Fate, see Chapter 5 pp. 79-113, also p. 148.

¹⁰⁴ "Pragmatic" is not a term Miss Krook connects with James, but I think it applies here.

The ambiguity is perhaps best defined as a huge, elaborate metaphor for James's experience of the unavoidable, unalterable mixed motive of all human action, and the consequent dual ('ambiguous') character of all human endeavour. The selfless motive is inseparable in experience from the selfish, the beneficent action from the acquisitive, the courage and intelligence of love from the craveness of fear, the beauty of good faith and good will from the meanness of moral evasion and the cruelty of sexual power. Nor are they merely conjoined but rather causally connected: the good is somehow the result of evil, the base is somehow a necessary condition of the noble.¹⁰⁵

Neither cancels out the other.

Though Miss Krook's explanation is by far the best I found, James L. Spencer may have been the first to perceive the real nature of James' ambiguity and the fact that it has positive value, though he does not emphasize his point and evidently is not aware of how important it is:

James was writing not a fable or an allegory, but a novel about real life, in which relationships between human beings are never clearly good or evil, successful or unsuccessful. The ambiguities help the central symbol to resist oversimplification and to remain true to the richness and complexity and irony of human life.¹⁰⁶

Several critics recognize ambiguity as a positive value in James, though they do not apply this term to it and few recognize the importance of it. Frederick Crews accurately perceives it and its correspondence with life as we know it: by the end of his career

James was gradually emancipating himself from black-versus-white contrasts of values. It became increasingly difficult for us to make simple moral judgments about a given character, for the author took greater care to treat both sides of the question with the

¹⁰⁵ Krook, The Ordeal, p. 319. See also pp. 322, 324 on The Golden Bowl; pp. 384, 388-89 on "The Turn of the Screw."

¹⁰⁶ James L. Spencer, "Symbolism in James's The Golden Bowl," Modern Fiction Studies, 3 (Winter 1957-58), 344.

sympathy they deserved, and to present his drama only as it was seen by the participants. His aim was rather to increase the feeling of genuine life in his novels than to reduce his own moral awareness to that of his characters. He did not attempt to manipulate the truth and moralize about it, but rather . . . to express it--that is, to represent it altogether in terms of human action.¹⁰⁷

James wishes not to moralize, not to choose one side against another, because it is not true to life: "The author of human action does not tell us what it means; that we must try to discover for ourselves."¹⁰⁸ James held moral views, which are present in the action, not separately in one character or another; the moral views need not be resolved (or dissolved) in moralizing. As Crews puts it, "The Golden Bowl ends, not on a note of moral finality which James has carefully trained one of his characters to strike, but rather on the same authentic dissonance, the perpetual clash of interests, with which the novel began."¹⁰⁹ James' desire to be true to reality (spiritual reality, one might say, rather than literal physical reality), coincident with his moralism, led him "to see that there was a morality beyond moralizing. His respect for Life--his love of reality in every form . . .--becomes the force through which the characters of The Golden Bowl are spared a judgment day."¹¹⁰

Sallie Sears is another who deeply senses what I mean by positive ambiguity but then loses her way: "We can take sides with no one. Or

¹⁰⁷ Crews, p. 113. See also pp. 8, 81, 84.

¹⁰⁸ Crews, p. 114.

¹⁰⁹ Crews, p. 114.

¹¹⁰ Crews, p. 114.

perhaps more accurately, we must take sides with everyone," she says. "The luxury of single identification is denied the reader; his pity and judgment must be spread over all."¹¹¹ She is right in sensing that many of James' works, including The Golden Bowl, "do not presuppose a 'correct' response (i.e., some final, objective truth) when they present contradictory or clashing viewpoints,"¹¹² but she actually goes on to contradict herself, unable to maintain tolerance for this lack of final, objective truth. Her final position, which she has been driven to by what she amazingly must feel is the logic of her previous comments, is: "The terms 'good' and 'evil' in such a context lose their meaning, become interchangeable and therefore in an ultimate sense 'absurd.' And morally this book is absurd."¹¹³ But Miss Sears' logic is faulty: the simultaneous existence of good and evil in this world does not make them interchangeable, nor does James' refusal to come out directly and moralize indicate that he had no morality. R. P. Blackmur, usually a perceptive critic on James, seems to have the same problem as Miss Sears, for he says that there is a "deep and ambiguous kind of capitulation of good to evil and evil to good" at the end of The Golden Bowl.¹¹⁴ Amazing as these views are, they are understandable when we see that these critics have both obviously felt James' ambiguity but have not known how to put it into words or intellectualize it. They

¹¹¹ Sears, p. 173.

¹¹² Sears, p. 176.

¹¹³ Sears, p. 222.

¹¹⁴ R. P. Blackmur in Robert E. Spiller, et. al., eds., Literary History of the United States (New York: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 1048-49.

have felt that the evil is not destroyed at the end of the book, but since their rational minds tell them that either good or evil must win out over the other at the end, it forces them to the conclusion that good capitulates to evil.

A. R. Gard very perceptively recognizes the "intention and achievement of total ambiguity" in The Golden Bowl; ¹¹⁵ his examination of certain examples of it is more thorough than Miss Krook's. But he feels that the existence of two opposite interpretations or "realities" for each character cannot mean that James was trying to present "the both," but rather that it indicates James is giving us an "either/or" situation, which he never resolves for us. Naturally Gard feels this is unsatisfactory. It is interesting, though, that the example he picks of the "either/or" ambiguity is Adam Verver: he "cannot 'really' be both a cold-blooded puppet-master and a benign and selfless American gentleman."¹¹⁶ Now Adam is the only character who does not primarily illustrate the "both" type of ambiguity, though even a "good" Adam could have innocently used Charlotte and the Prince in the first section of the book. But Adam's primary ambiguity we see in the second section, and it revolves around whether he knows what Charlotte and Amerigo have done, and whether he is consciously punishing his wife. And here his ambiguity consists of our "not knowing." Adam's primary ambiguity is "either/or" and it is unresolved, just as Gard suggests, but it is not to demonstrate the both, but rather the unknowability. Adam is also the only character whose dual interpretations cannot come together (in

¹¹⁵ Gard, p. 106.

¹¹⁶ Gard, p. 108.

Volume XXIV at least): he is thus the only character to demonstrate ambiguity in which we are presented with two opposite readings which are mutually exclusive, and one of which we have to reject. (Gard does not show how we are unable to combine qualities of "the both" of any other character.) With Adam in Volume XXIV, the situation is "either/or," but the idea is not to pick one of the alternatives. James is not trying to be clever by giving us two possible interpretations and then sitting back and asking us to play the game of choosing which one is correct. He is simply demonstrating the impossibility of knowing with finality people's motives and the solutions to problems. Gard believes that James did what he meant to do, but feels it is "nonsense," "defeats any useful purpose," and sacrifices the "moral cogency" of the work.¹¹⁷ Gard's thoughts, however, as we see, have not been clearly developed.

A few critics perceive James' ambiguity in the sense that I mean it--i.e., the intermixture of opposites--but do not label it as such. Ellen Douglass Leyburn says "James's fiction portrays man and his state as a mingling of good and bad, with virtues sometimes turning into vices and great wrong sometimes producing right."¹¹⁸ The proper form for this portrayal seems naturally to be a mixture of comedy and tragedy, with a liberal use of irony, which latter device is perhaps a very fusion of the comic and tragic emotions.¹¹⁹ R. P. Blackmur also perceives

¹¹⁷ Gard, p. 109.

¹¹⁸ Ellen Douglass Leyburn, Strange Alloy (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), p. xiii.

¹¹⁹ Leyburn, p. xiii, makes the point that James mixes comedy and tragedy and irony. The idea that irony itself combines tragic and comic emotions is mine. See also Leyburn, pp. 146 note, 173, 174.

correctly when he says of James: "It is not that his vision of evil may overcome his vision of good, but that, if he is to be an artist of any scope, he must create both, and if the emphasis is on the one in a given work it must have the other as its under or supporting side."¹²⁰ Finally, Christof Wegelin sees this ambiguity and relates it to James' International Theme:

Although James never lost his deep moral bias, the special value of his vision derives ultimately from his detachment from any one local point of view. This detachment prevented him from the kind of simplification which sees the world in black and white and led him finally to see the contrast between America and Europe in certain fundamental qualities which, not in themselves good or bad, contain the potentials for both.¹²¹

Let me return to Crews for a moment, for although I do not agree with his primary interpretations, some of his comments are very valuable for our study. His use of the term "inclusiveness" comes close, I think, to what I mean by "ambiguity." According to Crews, inclusiveness is a kind of "negative capability," which, in Keats' definition, is "when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason."¹²² Crews explains that inclusiveness is "the sum total of human experience," and it involves confronting and finding a way to deal with reality. Though Crews feels some Jamesian characters demonstrate inclusiveness, he believes that perhaps the real

¹²⁰ R. P. Blackmur, "In the Country of the Blue" in Dupee, The Question of Henry James, p. 201.

¹²¹ Wegelin, p. 86.

¹²² Crews, p. 112. John Keats, Letter to George and Tom Keats, 21 December 1817, in Charles Kaplan, ed., Criticism: Twenty Major Statements (San Francisco: Chandler, n.d.), p. 345.

inclusive hero is James himself.¹²³ Certainly this inclusiveness seems to me to be what James is demonstrating in The Golden Bowl. It is related to James' "all-inclusive choice" that Philip Rahv speaks of.¹²⁴

Ambiguity in James, then, takes two forms. The first and most common is ambiguity as a knowing--that both good and evil co-exist in each character, and that neither is eliminated at the end. This seems to be the most difficult type for most critics to understand, though there are some who do. The second ambiguity is that of not-knowing--on the part of the reader--which of two possible interpretations is correct. It is evidenced primarily in Adam Verver, but also in the question of an actual physical affair between Charlotte and the Prince, and also in the ending. This type of ambiguity is sensed by some critics but usually felt to be unintentional on James' part. While type one demonstrates the duality of life, type two illustrates its unknowability, particularly as to the outcome. James' ambiguity, then, is a method for getting across these truths.

I feel both ambiguities must have been intentional on James' part because they are pervasive and because without them there would remain

¹²³ Crews, pp. 111-12, 114.

¹²⁴ Philip Rahv, "The Heiress of All the Ages," Partisan Review, 10 (May-June 1943), 232. Actually, it is strange that critics have such difficulty with "ambiguity" in James. Several excellent studies have been made on ambiguity in certain stories of Hawthorne, and the term seems always to mean the presence of alternative meanings which are both "true." But James is more difficult and more complex than Hawthorne: the alternative meanings are at once less clear and more opposed. Hence the confusion of "ambiguity." See Richard Harter Fogle, Hawthorne's Fiction (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952); Roy R. Male, Hawthorne's Tragic Vision (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1957); Walter J. Paulits, "Ambivalence in 'Young Goodman Brown,'" American Literature, 41 (January 1970).

parts of the book which would not fit in with the whole. They are of positive value simply because they give the book the meaning I believe it has; I do not see how any other device could so well express the truths expressed by this book. I believe James understood ambiguity, for it is present in virtually everything he wrote, as well as in his life; but in The Golden Bowl, James' last complete novel (1904), written toward the end of his life, it is consummate.

How does James execute his ambiguity? For the first type, at times a specific action or detail is definitely on one side or the other of the moral spectrum--but contributes to the effect of both when put with actions or details of the other side. This effect may be achieved over a space of many pages, or within the same scene. It is most effective when within one scene, expressed in a rapid movement between one extreme and its opposite, as in Maggie's thoughts watching the bridge-players and her confrontation on the terrace with Charlotte, or in the religious imagery surrounding the adulterous kiss. The ambiguity is reinforced by James' use of two main points of view, and consequent two ways of looking at the events. It is also reinforced at times by the discrepancy between what we see and what characters think or tell us, or by the discrepancy between what is explicit in the scene and what is implicit. James carefully balances in these ways the bad points of Maggie and Adam with their good points, the good points of Charlotte and the Prince with their bad, and most importantly, the good points of the latter two with the bad of the former two.

The method which James uses primarily for his second type of ambiguity is that of a single act or speech being interpreted in two opposite ways, both equally possible, but neither resolved, as in many

of Adam's actions and most of his words to Maggie. James reinforces this with his use of punning and double entendre, which also helps him in type one but is used much more for type two. Two excellent examples of this come to mind at once; one is when Maggie tells the Prince she is sure

'of your having, and of your having for a long time had, two relations with Charlotte.'

He stared, a little at sea, as he took it up.
'"Two"--?'

. . . 'Oh you may have had fifty--had the same relation with her fifty times! It's of the number of kinds of relation with her that I speak.'¹²⁵

As the double entendre is not certainly resolved, the possibility remains in our minds that the Prince is not demonstrating his guilt, but simply confused in a more innocent way. The second example of punning is Mr. Verver's reference to the four of them "lying like gods together" (XXIV, 91), which Alan Rose points out has a triple reference.¹²⁶ The three meanings would be, I presume: 1) simply maintaining an easy and enjoyable life; 2) engaging in the sex act together; 3) prevaricating--all of which, of course, are true. The second meaning can even be subdivided, I think, into two more: a) Maggie and Amerigo lying together, and Adam and Charlotte; or b) Charlotte and Amerigo lying together. The fact that Adam may be using the expression in only the first meaning or in all three, and that we never know, reinforces the ambiguity of the second type.

¹²⁵ Henry James, The Golden Bowl (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), XXIV, pp. 190-91. All further quotations are from this edition, which takes up Volumes XXIII and XXIV in the New York Edition.

¹²⁶ Rose, p. 108.

But what evidence have we, aside from the novel, that James recognized ambiguity--i.e., the coexistence of evil with good, the uncertainty of the triumph of good, the impossibility of knowing? James' sense of evil was very strong, yet not so much so to overwhelm him. He was neither the shallow optimist some accuse his father of being,¹²⁷ nor the constitutional pessimist of many of his Continental and Russian contemporaries. He might be said to have been a realist or pragmatist. J. A. Ward calls James "a stoic who rejected the easy solutions of the optimist."¹²⁸ Henry Seidel Canby makes a fascinating comparison between James and Mark Twain: he says that Twain loved life for its own sake, James loved only selected aspects of life in which he could find values; Twain ultimately became full of disgust and cynicism toward life, while James never reacted this way in spite of all the sorrows and the near-breakdown he experienced.¹²⁹

James' law was to see the whole of life; no quiet cancelling-out of the unpleasant side was for him. Over and over again this is clear from his own statements. "I have the imagination of disaster--and see life as ferocious and sinister," he wrote in a letter.¹³⁰ His criticism of Emerson for having a moral sense with no vision of evil is well-known; he spoke of his "ripe unconsciousness of evil."¹³¹ He complained

¹²⁷ I do not agree with them and find this stance simplistic.

¹²⁸ J. A. Ward, The Imagination of Disaster (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), pp. 5-6.

¹²⁹ Henry Seidel Canby, Turn West, Turn East (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), p. 206.

¹³⁰ Letter to A. C. Benson in 1896, quoted in Lionel Trilling, The Liberal Imagination (New York: Viking Press, 1950), p. 60. This letter is not in Lubbock's two-volume edition of the letters.

¹³¹ Henry James, "Emerson," in The American Essays of Henry James (New York: Vintage, 1956), p. 56.

that Howells' novels exhibited "so small a perception of evil."¹³² In an essay on Turgenev he wrote:

Life is, in fact, a battle. On this point optimists and pessimists agree. Evil is insolent and strong; beauty enchanting but rare; goodness very apt to be weak; folly very apt to be defiant; wickedness to carry the day; imbeciles to be in great places, people of sense in small, and mankind generally, unhappy.¹³³

James recognized that the evil is within, as he demonstrates in this criticism of Baudelaire:

He knew evil not by experience, not as something within himself, but by contemplation and curiosity, as something outside of himself. . . . Evil for him begins outside and not inside, and consists primarily of a great deal of lurid landscape and unclean furniture. . . . Evil is represented as an affair of blood and carrion and physical sickness--there must be stinking corpses and starving prostitutes and empty laudanum bottles in order that the poet shall be effectively inspired. . . . He was, in his treatment of evil, exactly what Hawthorne was not--Hawthorne, who felt the thing at its source, deep in the human consciousness.¹³⁴

Because of his strong sense of evil in the world, James disliked the arbitrary optimism of the endings to George Eliot's novels,¹³⁵ as well as the optimism of his own father's philosophy.¹³⁶

In James' letters we find many examples of his sense of the evil and negative side of life. In one he said that "life is terrible,

¹³² Henry James, "William Dean Howells," in The American Essays of Henry James, p. 153.

¹³³ "Ivan Turgeneff," in French Poets and Novelists, p. 250; quoted in Ward, p. 6.

¹³⁴ "Charles Baudelaire," in French Poets and Novelists, p. 61; quoted in Ward, p. 4.

¹³⁵ Lebowitz, p. 42.

¹³⁶ Quoted in Ward, p. 6. From Notes of a Son and Brother, p. 224.

tragic, perverse and abysmal."¹³⁷ In another he revealed that the essential fact of his life was loneliness:

The port from which I set out was, I think, that of the essential loneliness of my life--and it seems to be the port also, in sooth, to which my course again finally directs itself! This loneliness (since I mention it!)--what is it still but the deepest thing about one? Deeper, about me, at any rate, than anything else; deeper than my 'genius,' deeper than my 'discipline,' deeper than my pride, deeper, above all, than the deep counterminings of art.¹³⁸

In a letter to a friend in pain, James wrote:

Only sit tight yourself and go through the movements of life. That keeps up our connection with life--I mean of the immediate and apparent life; behind which, all the while, the deeper and darker and unapparent, in which things really happen to us, learns, under that hygiene, to stay in its place. Let it get out of its place and it swamps the scene; besides which its place, God knows, is enough for it! Live it all through, every inch of it--out of it something valuable will come--but live it ever so quietly; and . . . waitingly!¹³⁹

Two years before his death, the aging James wrote to the still older Henry Adams:

I have your melancholy outpouring of the 7th, and I know not how better to acknowledge it than by the full recognition of its unmitigated blackness. Of course we are lone survivors, of course the past that was our lives is at the bottom of an abyss--if the abyss has any bottom; of course, too, there's no use talking unless one particularly wants to. But the purpose, almost, of my printed divagations was to show you that one can, strange to say, still want to--or at least can behave as if one did. Behold me therefore so behaving--and apparently capable of continuing to do so.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Henry James, The Letters of Henry James (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), ed. Percy Lubbock, Vol. II, p. 91. Written in 1908.

¹³⁸ Quoted in Leon Edel, Henry James: The Treacherous Years (1895-1901) (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1969), p. 350. Written in 1900.

¹³⁹ Letters, Vol. II, pp. 104-05. Written in 1908.

¹⁴⁰ Letters, Vol. II, pp. 360-61. Written in 1914.

The fact that hope and "something valuable" are still present does not cancel out, nor even much diminish, the sense of "the deeper and darker and unapparent."

James said another very interesting thing about evil, and, although he was speaking more in a technical sense of the writer's difficulty in getting across a "general vision of evil intense enough" for the reader of "The Turn of the Screw,"¹⁴¹ it does not seem to me to twist its spirit in applying it to the mixture of good and evil in The Golden Bowl. "There is," wrote James of the evil the ghosts work on the two children, "for such a case no eligible absolute of the wrong; it remains relative to fifty other elements."¹⁴² In other words, wrong or evil is defined by the context, and in such cases an act good in certain circumstances might be the very opposite in others. This seems to me very relevant to The Golden Bowl, especially when all the characters start off with such good intentions.

But James was not only aware of isolated evil in this world, but of its often surprising mixture with good. In his preface to Volume XI of the New York Edition he speaks of "the confusion of life": "the close connexion of bliss and bale, of the things that help with the things that hurt, so dangling before us for ever that bright hard medal, of so strange an alloy, one face of which is somebody's right and ease and the other somebody's pain and wrong."¹⁴³ He goes on to speak of this "terribly mixed little world" which he creates for Maisie in his short novel

¹⁴¹ Henry James, The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 176. Referred to hereafter as Prefaces.

¹⁴² Prefaces, p. 176.

¹⁴³ Prefaces, p. 143.

What Maisie Knew, yet it seems also to describe the mixed world of The Golden Bowl. In another preface James elaborates this image of the medal, and although he is speaking of The Wings of the Dove, I think what he says is enlightening for The Golden Bowl, in connection with the remarks just quoted: "Could I but make my medal hang free, its obverse and its reverse, its face and its back, would beautifully become optional for the spectator. I somehow wanted them correspondingly embossed, wanted them inscribed and figured with an equal salience."¹⁴⁴

This mixture of evil and good is evident in James' somewhat surprising description of what the daily business of art and living was for him: "'We open the door to the Devil himself--who is nothing but the sense of beauty, of mystery, of relations, of appearances, of abysses, of the whole--and of expression!'"¹⁴⁵

James also saw that at times faults could turn into virtues; writing of certain of his American characters, he notes how "their negatives were converted and became in certain relations lively positives and values." And he goes on, "I might give a considerable list of those of my fictions, longer and shorter, in which this curious conversion is noted."¹⁴⁶ James' realization of the close connection between negatives

¹⁴⁴ Prefaces, p. 294.

¹⁴⁵ Quoted in Leon Edel, Henry James: The Treacherous Years, p. 355. Written in 1900.

¹⁴⁶ Prefaces, p. 188. The Preface of The Golden Bowl is not very illuminating for us: James discusses the novel itself for only four pages (and that is almost entirely on the double point of view)--then launches into four and a half pages on choosing the photographs for the frontispieces of the New York Edition, and 13½ pages on revision as a whole. Yet even a full preface on the novel itself still might not give us clues about the meaning of the book, for much of what James discusses in his prefaces is "technical," bound up with his "craft"--or with how he got his idea for the story.

and positives came as early as 1878, when he wrote this definition of a "cosmopolite": "You have formed the habit of comparing, of looking for points of difference and of resemblance, for present and absent advantages, for the virtues that go with certain defects, and the defects that go with certain virtues."¹⁴⁷ James realized the mixture of good and evil, "kept throughout life the sense of the abyss always lurking beneath the fragile surface," as Matthiessen suggests.¹⁴⁸ Stephen Spender sees it too: "Beneath the stylistic surface . . . of James's work, there lurk forms of violence and chaos. His technical mastery has the perfection of frightful balance and frightful tension: beneath the stretched out compositions there are abysses of despair and disbelief: Ulysses and The Waste Land."¹⁴⁹ For James recognized, in his own words, that "the terrible law of the artist" is "the acceptance of all experience, of all suffering, of all life."¹⁵⁰

Perhaps James' sense of ambiguity, which I have tried to explore in the last several pages, best displays itself in part of a letter he wrote to his brother William as early as 1888, when he was only 45, and 16 years before The Golden Bowl appeared. His remarks concern not good and evil, but that other pair of supposed opposites of his experience, America and Europe:

¹⁴⁷ Henry James, Portraits of Places (New York: Lear Publishers, 1948), pp. 115-16.

¹⁴⁸ Matthiessen, p. 143.

¹⁴⁹ Stephen Spender, The Destructive Element (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1936), p. 98.

¹⁵⁰ Henry James, The Notebooks of Henry James, ed. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 111.

I aspire to write in such a way that it would be impossible to an outsider to say whether I am at a given moment an American writing about England or an Englishman writing about America (dealing as I do with both countries,) and so far from being ashamed of such an ambiguity I should be exceedingly proud of it, for it would be highly civilized.¹⁵¹

Indeed, his recognition of the ambiguity of all human experience, was "highly civilized."

¹⁵¹ Letters, Vol. I, pp. 141-42.

CHAPTER II

"INNOCENCE IN THE GUILT": CHARLOTTE AND THE PRINCE

Charlotte

Charlotte Stant's good qualities are her beauty, charm, sophistication, her evident good faith, and her unquestionable honesty and cool headedness during what must have been Mr. Verver's very tempting proposal of marriage. She is very attractive in the first part of the book, but our sympathy and admiration for her never quite leave us even in the second section. Mrs. Assingham prepares us by praising her beauty, and when she first appears the Prince gives us this captivating view of her: she is

a tall strong charming girl who wore for him at first exactly the air of her adventurous situation, a reference in all her person, in motion and gesture, in free vivid yet altogether happy indications of dress, . . . to far countries and long journeys, the knowledge of how and where and the habit, founded on experience, of not being afraid. . . . He had . . . his own view of this young lady's strength of mind. It was great, he had ground to believe, but it would never interfere with the play of her extremely personal, her always amusing taste. (XXIII, 45)

He goes on (XXIII, 46-47) to praise her physical attributes: the sensuality of the description is partly a reflection of his own mind, but there is sufficient objective evidence that Charlotte is a well-endowed, full-blooded, young woman.

Charlotte's ambiguity is that she perpetrates evil yet remains attractive in many ways. The very wrong itself--her affair with the

Prince--is led up to by events which seem beautiful: the great evening party at which she appears with the Prince, their communication which ends in a "sacred" vow and passionate kiss, the houseparty at Matcham. Her ambiguity is also that once we are certain of her guilt and "evil" side, we are still drawn to her by the suffering which Maggie, the Prince, and Adam inflict upon her. Maggie early calls her "great," and at the end she is even "greater." She is a magnificent woman throughout; because of this, James could not have her destroyed at the end.

Charlotte, like her counterparts Kate Croy in The Wings of the Dove and Madame Merle in The Portrait of a Lady, remains beautiful throughout the book, even when she is perpetrating wrong. Unquestionably the greatest wrongdoer of the book, insofar as it is she who leads the Prince astray, at her worst she manages only to appear cold and hard, and this in only three or four instances. We see and hear much of her beauty and good qualities before and during her first appearance, but the circumstances of that appearance have in them something to make us uneasy and give a foreshadowing of what is to come. Charlotte is a Europeanized American, daughter of Europeanized Americans, who are described extraordinarily as "themselves already of a corrupt generation, demoralised falsified polyglot well before her" (XXIII, 55). She arrives days before the Prince's marriage to Maggie, and we mistrust her when we realize she has made the Prince uneasy by her request to go with her to find a wedding present for Maggie (XXIII, 61).

In spite of Mrs. Assingham's attestations that Charlotte is not "bad," that the last thing she wants to do is hurt Maggie (XXIII, 38), that she wants to be "magnificent," "superior," "heroic," and "sublime" (XXIII, 84-85) by renouncing her former lover, and in spite of

Charlotte's own attestation that her only reason for coming back before the Prince's wedding was to have one hour alone with him (XXIII, 89, 96-98), there is something in her words which makes us suspect that in showing the Prince how much she renounces him, she wishes him to have a heroic conception of her. Further, she clearly shows him by her verbal renunciation how much she still cares for him. The fact that she so strongly wanted to be able to tell him this before his marriage casts even more suspicion on her. When she confesses her real desire for the wedding-present hunt was to give a wedding present to the Prince, our suspicions are confirmed (XXIII, 109). Her intimate exchange of remarks with the Prince in Italian in front of the shop owner, her sense of how beautiful she and the Prince look together (XXIII, 106), and her deliberate and questionably motivated lie¹ to the Prince as to the price the man asked for the golden bowl (XXIII, 118), are more hints which James gives us about the evil side of this beautiful and captivating woman.

Charlotte is described by Maggie, early in the book, as "'so great'": "'great in nature, in character, in spirit. Great in life. . . She has a great imagination. She has, in every way, a great attitude. She has above all a great conscience'" (XXIII, 180-82). These comments seem true, even when we know more about Charlotte. At the end of the book this sentiment is echoed, as we shall see, though it has a different meaning then.

Another side of Charlotte is seen after Maggie's marriage, when the former comes to stay with Maggie, the Prince, and Mr. Verver. The

¹ Krook has a complicated theory, The Ordeal, pp. 292-93, but it seems more likely to me that James simply wanted to show Charlotte lying near the beginning of the book to cast our suspicions on her.

rather stupid Miss Lutches and Mrs. Rance she "simply 'cleared . . . out'" (XXIII, 192); she is spoken of as having "'a plan'" (XXIII, 194), presumably to help make the Ververs "great"; when Maggie and the Prince take a holiday to Italy, Charlotte writes daily, largely to reassure Maggie as to the health and well-being of her son, thus taking a burden off Mr. Verver; she "simplified existence" for him (XXIII, 201); she handles Adam Verver's buying of the Damascene tiles beautifully. She is nowhere more beautiful, physically and morally, than in the scene by the beach when Mr. Verver proposes to her: she acts in such a way that we have no reason to distrust her or to feel that she is not being honest. Charlotte questions Adam in detail to make certain he knows what he is doing; if she were purely selfish or self-seeking, she certainly would not have done this, but would have immediately agreed to marry him. As it is, she refuses to give an answer until she knows how Maggie feels about the proposal. Mr. Verver's reason for wanting to marry her seems to consist of his wishing to do the best thing for Maggie: "'To put her at peace is therefore . . . what I'm trying, with you, to do. I can't do it alone, but I can do it with your help. You can make her . . . positively happy about me. . . .You'll effectually put out of her mind that I feel she has abandoned me'" (XXIII, 223). Charlotte is, rightly, doubtful: "'But isn't it, possibly, . . .not quite enough to marry me for?'" and, "'You've certainly worked it out!'" (XXIII, 224). At the end of the colloquy Adam wants Charlotte "'to see . . . how I need you.'" 'I already see,' said Charlotte, 'how you've persuaded yourself you do. . . .That isn't unfortunately all'" (XXIII, 226). Charlotte, in this conversation, is described as "kind," "sincere," "honorable," "honest," and "merciful," and within the context

of the scene these words are just. Her moral beauty extends to her offer to show Adam Verver the Prince's telegram (XXIII, 240-41), on the basis of which she agrees to marry Adam.

James causes Charlotte to appear deliberately ambiguous in her first scene after her marriage to Adam (which has taken place some months before): we pity her for the unfortunate side of her marriage, but we dislike something in her as well. On the night of a great party at which Charlotte appears attended by the Prince, in a conversation with Mrs. Assingham she expresses her recognition that, as Mrs. Verver, "it belongs to my situation that I'm, by no merit of my own, just fixed--fixed as fast as a pin stuck up to its head in a cushion. I'm placed--I can't imagine anyone more placed. There I am!" (XXIII, 256). By this she means she is to accept all the conditions of existence Maggie and Adam force on her, to let them be alone together while she remains in their background. The poignancy of her situation is that Adam Verver's love for his daughter is

'the greatest affection of which he's capable. . . . I do distinctly [believe it]--and in spite of my having done all I could think of to make him capable of a greater. I've done, earnestly, everything I could--I've made it, month after month, my study. But I haven't succeeded--that has been vividly brought home to me to-night.' (XXIII, 262)

Yet there is something slightly cold and hard and self-conscious about Charlotte in this scene; it is pervasive but almost indefinable, and very difficult to pinpoint concretely. Fanny Assingham says to her, "You ought to be absolutely happy. You live with such good people," and this quality I am speaking of is part of Charlotte's reaction: "The effect of it, as well, was an arrest for Charlotte; whose face however all of whose fine and slightly hard radiance, it had the next instant

caused further to brighten" (XXIII, 258). James' description of her at the end of the scene has her noble, disappointed, "patient and lonely in her splendour," and without "any vulgarity of triumph," yet previous to this he has her carefully make a "selection" of the "most effective possible" appearance (XXIII, 263-64). Thus even in her suffering James shows her to be self-conscious and calculating. Charlotte is too concerned with making a desired impression on Mrs. Assingham about her relationship with the Prince in this scene.

Charlotte justifies her relationship with the Prince in great detail in Chapters IV and V of Book 3. Still her intentions are good, though we can see pretty clearly that she is fooling herself. She is full of "propriety" and "tact" in her visit to the Prince (XXIII, 288); "nobleness" and "sincerity" are hers when she says it is "their privilege and their duty" to spend their time "taking care" of Maggie and Adam (XXIII, 309). Indeed, her attitude toward these two becomes clear now, when pieced together with her previous remarks (XXIII, 101-03, 252): Charlotte thinks of them as children, "'very, very simple'" (XXIII, 311), who are to be pitied (XXIII, 103) and watched over with tenderness (XXIII, 311). They are not to be hurt, they are to be allowed to continue unhampered with the life they have chosen, and so they will be spared the knowledge that Charlotte and the Prince are not happy with that life. The latter, in the meantime, to make up for that unhappiness, will have each other, but so delicately and discreetly that Maggie and Adam will never know.

Charlotte thinks of their situation in these terms: "nothing stranger surely had ever happened to a conscientious, a well-meaning, a perfectly passive pair: no more extraordinary decree had ever been

launched against such victims than this of forcing them against their will into a relation of mutual close contact that they had done everything to avoid" (XXIII, 289). In the climactic scene in which the Prince and Charlotte finally say all of this to each other, and enter consciously into a new and openly close relation, James' positive ambiguity abounds, as Jean Kimball notes.² To Charlotte the new relation seems obvious, the only thing they can do (XXIII, 302-03). The whole idea seems beautiful and natural; as readers, we are compelled to feel it so, even if we rationally know it is just the opposite. "The privilege, the duty, the opportunity," all merge into one (XXIII, 310). Maggie and her father are so "'extraordinarily happy'" (XXIII, 310) with their situation as it is that it would be cruelty to do anything but take advantage of it. The language becomes laden with religious terms and especially words describing religious ecstasy. Though this is used partly to correspond with their ecstasy of physical love which expresses itself climactically in an intense kiss, it also serves another function. The religious language allies with the feelings of beauty and rightness the Prince and Charlotte have about their actions, to create that ambiguity for the reader of the right and the wrong somehow intermixed in one act. The Prince has "a light of excited perception" which is a "glory"; Charlotte describes Maggie and Mr. Verver as "'beatifically'" happy; the Prince says they will trust each other

² Kimball, p. 461. She asks us to consider the possibility that Charlotte and the Prince are actually renouncing each other in this scene, sealing the act with a "sacred" kiss. This interpretation is the result of her perception of James' underlying, implicit tone--the religious imagery, etc.--but it is wrong, for it fails to see the explicit act.

"'Oh as we trust the saints in glory'"; and finally "'It's sacred,' he said at last. 'It's sacred,' she breathed back to him. They vowed it" (XXIII, 310-12). This kiss with which the scene ends hardly jolts us out of the spell, it is depicted with the same passion and intensity as the entire scene.

When the Prince and Charlotte decide to make their crucial excursion to Gloucester which is the beginning of their real affair (Chapter IX of Book 3), it is Charlotte who arranges everything. She is too premeditated, too clever. On the basis of no uttered words with the Prince, but only a felt communion with him, she has thought of each detail, down to the particular train they will take back to London. So far is she from feeling guilty about what they are doing, she feels they are positively living up to the expectations of their sposi by going to see the cathedral. This may indeed be true, but surely their sposi did not expect them to commit adultery as well.

In the second volume Charlotte changes; she senses a change in Maggie and life becomes more complicated. For a time her energy is concentrated in not doing anything to "startle" Maggie (XXIV, 104), in weaving a "fine tissue of reassurance" to be thrown over Adam's vision (XXIV, 138). She tries to be even more natural and co-operative than before, does anything Maggie requests, and more; she wants Maggie not to suspect her and everything to return to normal. Ultimately, as the Prince is confronted with proof of his relationship with Charlotte and yet refuses to tell her anything, her uneasy state is changed to one that is positively "struggling" and "haunted" (XXIV, 229). Her great punishment is to be that she will "not know," i.e., not know how and why her lover betrayed her (XXIV, 202, 213-14, 218, 227-28, 328-29, 335-36).

Maggie imagines her several times as trapped in a cage, "a prisoner looking through bars" (XXIV, 229-30; XXIV, 239, 241, 283). Charlotte is driven to pursue Maggie (who sees her as temporarily out of her cage), to ask her if there is any wrong Maggie considers Charlotte has done her. This scene on the terrace and in the drawing-room shows Charlotte at her most disagreeable; she is fearsome: indeed, she terrifies Maggie. Still, always, even now, she is attractive: James makes that very clear (XXIV, 243). Her lies to Maggie, that she has done her no wrong, are deliberate and flagrant; she elaborates them until we as readers are outraged (XXIV, 248-49). During this scene Charlotte is cold, remote, different from the Charlotte of other scenes; we cannot yet pity her. The kiss which she exacts from Maggie at the end of the scene has been called a "Judas kiss."

After this scene Charlotte is much more to be pitied than feared or hated. We see her almost entirely through Maggie's eyes for the rest of the book, and the latter's sense of Charlotte's suffering, and her pity and compassion for her, are great. Maggie has the sense that her father's and Charlotte's

connexion wouldn't have been wrongly figured if he had been thought of as holding in one of his pocketed hands the end of a long silken halter looped round her beautiful neck. He didn't twitch it, yet it was there; he didn't drag her, but she came. (XXIV, 287)

Charlotte cannot take her eyes from her husband, the author of her fate, as it were (XXIV, 284-86); the girl who was represented earlier as not afraid of anything (XXIII, 45, 181) is now full of fear (XXIV, 287-88). She fears going to America, which is awful for her (XXIII, 40, 56, 68-69; XXIV, 288, 311-12); she fears, of course, severing her connection with the Prince. The suffering which we see Charlotte experiencing gives us great sympathy for her and prevents us from really disliking

her. Her "evil" seems hardly worth thinking of in these circumstances.

Charlotte now takes guests on little tours of her husband's art treasures; the idea is that she is perhaps rehearsing for her life to come in American City. In her act is her "submission to duty"; it is as if she were singing a "hymn of praise" to the beauty of the treasures (XXIV, 290). Suddenly Charlotte's voice "quavered" like "the shriek of a soul in pain" (XXIV, 291-92), which causes tears to come to the eyes of both Maggie and her father.

When Charlotte takes "flight" (XXIV, 307) into the noonday heat to be alone with her misery, Maggie goes after her, and the tables are turned from Charlotte's pursuit of Maggie on the terrace. James' language asks us to have compassion for Charlotte: she is described as a "poor wandering woman," in a "frenzy"; the shady place where she has stopped is an "asylum," a "retreat" (XXIV, 308-09). Maggie sees her misery as naked, "unveiled," and "tragic" (XXIV, 312). At first she is terrified when she sees Maggie has followed her, and this in itself is grounds for our pity; she recovers some confidence when she sees Maggie is not going to do anything horrible, but she is unable to cover up the tragedy so apparent in her situation. Her defense is pride; this is the only thing which keeps her from confessing both her "doom" and her "falsity" (XXIV, 312). Charlotte, to save her face and her pride, tells Maggie it is she who has chosen to go to America, because she wants her husband to herself, away from the possessiveness of his daughter. Though Charlotte is rather cold and hard in this scene, as in certain others where she has seemed disagreeable to us, we feel great pity and sympathy for her because James never lets us forget the horror of her situation.

From this scene until the end of the book we see Charlotte only in terms of pity and compassion. She feels "humiliation," she is "frantically tapping" behind the glass of her relation with the Prince (XXIV, 329), she pays more than the Prince (SSIV, 332), she is "in pain," "in torment" (XXIV, 345). Maggie imagines that Charlotte tells her about Charlotte's own relationship with the Prince:

'Ours was everything a relation could be, filled to the brim with the wine of consciousness; and if it was to have no meaning, no better meaning than that such a creature as you could breathe upon it, at your hour, for blight, why was I myself dealt with all for deception? why condemned after a couple of short years to find the golden flame--oh the golden flame!--a mere handful of black ashes?' (XXIV, 329-30)

It is this discrepancy between what Charlotte has tried for and what she has gotten that leads Bayley rightly to call her, along with the Prince, "tragic."³

But by the last scene we feel "'She'll make it'" (XXIV, 349). Maggie sees Charlotte and Mr. Verver "conjoined . . . as Maggie had absolutely never yet seen them (XXIV, 357); this is a good indication that indeed she will "make it." As she sits with her husband taking tea for the last time with Maggie and the Prince, she possesses "serenity," "beauty," and "security"; she has controlled her pain and suffering, even if it is something she has to work at, which we are given to feel (XXIV, 357-58). She has accepted her "mission": "representing the arts and the graces to a people languishing afar off and in ignorance" (XXIV, 357). She is to be used, not to be "wasted" (XXIV, 365-66). Thus it is that Charlotte truly does become "incomparable," "great," and "beautiful" as Maggie and Adam proclaim at the end (XXIV, 363-65:

³ Bayley, p. 233.

and it means volumes more now than Maggie's declaration of Charlotte's "greatness" at the beginning (XXIII, 180-82). This woman who committed evil is still beautiful and capable of good. It is no accident that there are so many critics who defend her and even go so far as to see her as the heroine.

Charlotte's and the Prince's ambiguity is not the same thing as the old Jamesian conflict between "appearance" and "reality." Both she and he began with good faith and good intentions; it was not merely that they "appeared" so to Maggie and Adam. Also, even when Maggie perceives the "reality" behind the "appearances"--i.e., the evil seated behind the good--the story does not end there. There are other "goods" behind those "evils"--for so the progression goes in this novel. "Appearance" versus "reality" is only one of the oppositions which James uses to reinforce his ambiguity. The fact that at times we cannot distinguish between appearance and reality--e.g., does Adam know or not?, is he punishing Charlotte or not?--only proves that the potentialities for good and evil both exist, and we cannot always interpret the data which chance throws up at us. At times we simply have to go on, not-knowing, as is illustrated by Charlotte at the end.

The Prince

On the surface what the Prince does is very bad--i.e., he, a married man, starts again a past affair with a woman who is not only his father-in-law's wife but his own wife's best friend--but there are certain circumstances which extenuate and which cause us to understand him and sympathize with him. His ambiguity stems from 1) this double awareness of his guilt and our knowledge of the reasons for his guilt, 2) a certain duality in himself as to the social or historical man as opposed

to the personal or concrete man, and 3) our not knowing at the end what his real feelings are towards Maggie and his new situation, and what lies ahead for him in this new situation.

From the very first sentence of the book Prince Amerigo is linked to history and tradition, and we come to see that he has virtually two selves, the personal and the racial or historical. As he remembers his saying to Maggie:

'There are two parts of me. . . . One is made up of the history, the doings, the marriages, the crimes, the follies, the boundless bêtises of other people--especially of their infamous waste of money that might have come to me. Those things are written. . . . Everybody can get at them, and you've both of you wonderfully looked them in the face. But there's another part, very much smaller doubtless, which, such as it is, represents my single self, the unknown, unimportant--unimportant save to you--personal quantity. about this you've found out nothing.' (XXIII, 9)

The Prince also contemplates that personally he does not possess the vices of arrogance and greed:

His race, on the other hand, had had them handsomely enough, and he was somehow full of his race. Its presence in him was like the consciousness of some inexpugnable scent in which his clothes, his whole person, his hands and the hair of his head, might have been steeped as in some chemical bath: the effect was nowhere in particular, yet he constantly felt himself at the mercy of the cause. (XXIII, 16)

Thus James paves the way from the very beginning as to the Prince's ambiguity. In him it takes the form of a dualism which causes him to do the wrong things for the right reasons, to perpetrate evil when he thinks he is doing the best possible thing for everyone.

There are two other things which are noteworthy about this duality. One is that Adam and Maggie have "found out nothing" about the actual personal characteristics of the man she is to marry, though Amerigo

recognizes that aspect is important for them to know. He senses that she is marrying him for his "history," not for himself, which is perhaps how he can himself marry her essentially for her money (XXIII, 16-17), not for herself, though he does find her "charming" and full of "amiability" (XXIII, 16, 20). The second thing to note is that his sense of the "ugliness" of some of his past history is the direct cause of his "desire for some new history" which he feels he will acquire with his marriage (XXIII, 16). A descendant of the discoverer of America, Amerigo Vespucci (XXIII, 78-79), he thinks of himself in his present about-to-be-wed position as "'starting on the great voyage--across the unknown sea'" (XXIII, 26). Thus it appears that he would like to bury some of the unsavory and even evil elements in his past and start afresh, a positive ambition and one which we must admire him for.

The Prince's one lack, which becomes his "evil," is his lack of a "moral" sense (XXIII, 31), this lack being definitely related to his Roman heritage. The "good," however, and a surprising one, is that he is very much aware of this lack, communicating it to Mrs. Assingham. On the good side, he intends to be "decent" (XXIII, 5) is "genial, charming" (XXIII, 6), and has both "good faith" and "humility" (XXIII, 29). His philosophy of life which he sums up is admirable enough: "'It's always a question of doing the best for one's self one can--without injury to others'" (XXIII, 58). In spite of his great regard for Mr. Verver and his being pleased with Maggie, he is nevertheless puzzled and troubled by certain things about the Ververs. He mulls these over, again and again, and we have to feel that his attempt to understand is a mark on his "positive" side.

In an extraordinary image, the Prince visualizes his confusion toward the Ververs:

He remembered to have read as a boy a wonderful tale by Allan Poe, his prospective wife's countryman . . . the story of the shipwrecked Gordon Pym, who, drifting in a small boat . . . found at a given moment before him a thickness of white air that was like a dazzling curtain of light, concealing as darkness conceals, yet of the colour of milk or of snow. There were moments when he felt his own boat move upon some such mystery. The state of mind of his new friends . . . had resemblances to a great white curtain. He had never known curtains but as purple even to blackness--but as producing where they hung a darkness intended and ominous. (XXIII, 22-23)

This image of the white curtain is a beautiful example of James' ambiguity, and at least one critic has compared it to Melville's symbol of the white whale.⁴ It can also be thought of in connection with John Webster's seventeenth century play The White Devil, full of the mixture of opposites. We are accustomed to thinking of whiteness or light as revealing or illuminating, whereas here the idea of whiteness which conceals contains in it the very paradox of the innocence in the guilt and the guilt in the innocence. A concealing curtain that is white jars on our stereotyped categorizations and makes us see the possible discrepancy between appearance and reality, and the admixture of good and evil. A little further on the image extends in the Prince's mind into a "veil," then into a "shroud," which he proposes to give "a twitch" in the last words of the chapter (XXIII, 24). Though "shroud" has the general meaning of "covering," it cannot help but call to our minds its more specific meaning of a cloth covering the dead. This is an odd picture for the Prince's mind to conjure up on the eve of his marriage, and a foreshadowing of both the darker side of his own nature and the general tragedy to come. His uneasiness, by these images, is made clear from the beginning, though we

⁴ F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp. 302-04. See also Sears, pp. 194-96, and Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death In the American Novel (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), p. 306.

as readers find it difficult to grasp at this early stage.

Certain things about English habits and morality trouble the Prince at various points throughout the first volume, which is written mainly in his point of view. These disturbing qualities of the English are related to the white curtain, for it is stressed during these later meditations that he only wants to see, to understand, what it is all about; in this he asks Mrs. Assingham's help (XXIII, 30). English morality seems to him like a pot of tea that they need only drink more of in order to become more moral (XXIII, 32), or it works on steam and sends them "'up like a rocket'" while the Romans must grope up an old stone staircase with half the steps missing and find just as easy to turn around and come down as to ascend (XXIII, 31). The Prince only wants to comprehend the people in whose society he moves, especially his wife and his father-in-law (XXIII, 158); he collects explanations, as it were--hoping that some day he will be able to piece them together and figure everything out (XXIII, 160-61, 163). The Prince ultimately begins to feel, after much time spent with the English and much effort spent trying to understand them, that he is not "whole" when with the English and doing English things: "something of him, he often felt at these times, was left out" (XXIII, 328). He only feels undivided when alone, or "with his own people," or with Charlotte (XXIII, 328). "'We haven't the same values'" (XXIII, 139), he correctly understands. We cannot help but have sympathy with the Prince in this, especially since he has been trying so hard to understand and conform.

The Prince's most significant thought along these lines concerns his sense of "the droll ambiguity of English relations" which consists in "the fathomless depths of English equivocation" (XXIII, 353). He is puzzled at "the element of staleness in all the freshness and of

freshness in all the staleness, of innocence in the guilt and of guilt in the innocence" (XXIII, 354): it is the mixture which seems to confuse him most; either one, in undiluted form, it seems, he would know how to deal with. This mixture is what makes it impossible for him to make "a discerned relation between a given appearance and a taken meaning" (XXIII, 354); oddly, this inability to distinguish appearance from reality is Maggie's trouble too, as we shall see. For Maggie, however, it is ultimately easier to accept the "mixture"--i.e., ambiguity--of things, perhaps because her life depends upon it.

In every scene with Charlotte (and in certain crucial scenes with Maggie, as well), the Prince is polite but passive, taking his cue from her but hoping to be "let off." This passivity becomes both a positive and negative quality, in itself is an admixture and so "ambiguous." Insofar as he does not wish nor try to get re-involved with Charlotte, we applaud him, but his allowing himself, out of inertia or passivity, to be eventually overwhelmed by her must be considered part of his "moral weakness."

When the Prince sees Charlotte for the first time since their previous affair, he tries to be kind without being intimate. He is afraid she may throw herself into his arms--afraid, that is, for her, not for himself. His lack of fear and consequent confidence in himself shows beautifully in his thought:

But what could he do but just let her see that he would make anything, everything, for her, as honourably easy as possible? Even if she should throw herself into his arms he would make that easy--easy, that is, to overlook, to ignore, not to remember, and not by the same token either to regret. (XXIII, 51)

Toward the end of the interview the Prince feels relieved that Charlotte is not threatening him, not making any claims on him: "He was safe, in

a word--that was what it all meant; and he had required to be safe" (XXIII, 59). Yet when Charlotte announces she wishes him to accompany her on a search for a wedding present for Maggie, he becomes immediately uneasy: "It was after all rather more than he had been reckoning with. . . . It wasn't the note of safety" (XXIII, 61). Yet out of politeness, and out of belief in Charlotte's good faith and his own, he squelches his uneasiness; when Mrs. Assingham, who is supposed to help give him moral sense, agrees wholeheartedly to the proposal, the Prince's qualms disappear, and he is convinced he will be doing nothing out of the ordinary. Thus it is that he does the wrong thing for the right reasons. Critics have not generally seen the complex reasoning that leads the Prince to accept Charlotte's invitation. It has to be counted as one of James' successes in giving us a positive feeling toward the Prince.

Amerigo's reluctance to become re-involved with Charlotte is not mentioned by critics, in spite of abundant evidence of it. Before their excursion he thinks, "There had been something, frankly, a little disconcerting in such an appeal at such an hour, on the very eve of his nuptials. . . . This was like beginning something over, which was the last thing he wanted" (XXIII, 94-95). Yet he is so certain that Charlotte has renounced him entirely (XXIII, 95), that he decides "apparent scruples were obviously fuss" (XXIII, 95). Before their shopping tour Charlotte gives him an explanation of her desire to see him alone, and at the end of that conversation, "He clutched . . . at . . . the fact that she let him off, definitely let him off" (XXIII, 98). He still feels safe. So far the Prince has not been fooling himself nor rationalizing.

During the search in a particular shop, however, the Prince lapses into affectionate language with Charlotte, and even wishes to give her a present. We are given no indication of any awareness on his part that he is violating his engagement: we are evidently to take these lapses as due to his lack of a moral sense. On the positive side, he refuses to accept any present from Charlotte. His refusal to accept the golden bowl from her is proof of his desire to save his marriage: he senses the bowl is cracked, a bad omen and a danger to his future (XXIII, 119). He speaks to her again, as he did in the previous meeting, on the subject of her marriage. She must marry--he is clear about that; perhaps subconsciously he would feel more "safe" if both he and she were attached. On the whole, what we see up to this point in the Prince is still his "good faith."

When the Prince (married to Maggie two or three years) and Charlotte (Mrs. Verver for perhaps a year) appear at the great party together, the former is full of ease and "perfect good nature" (XXIII, 266), unaware that others suspect he and Charlotte may be doing something wrong. Indeed, he seems almost as naive and innocent in this respect as Maggie. This contrasts with Charlotte's self-consciousness and awareness of what others are thinking of her in this scene. The Prince explains to Mrs. Assingham his being there with Charlotte in an interesting image. He has just explained that both he and Charlotte are "in Mr. Verver's boat" (XXIII, 267-68); he goes on:

"The "boat," you see . . . is a good deal tied up at the dock, or anchored, if you like, out in the stream. I have to jump out from time to time to stretch my legs, and you'll probably perceive, if you give it your attention, that Charlotte really can't help occasionally doing the same. It isn't even a question, sometimes, of one's getting to the dock--one has to take a header

and splash about in the water. Call our having remained here together tonight . . . call the whole thing one of the harmless little plunges, off the deck, inevitable for each of us. Why not take them, when they occur, as inevitable--and above all as not endangering life or limb? We shan't drown, we shan't sink.' (XXIII, 270)

Yet there is something which gives him away, so subtle we might almost miss it. James always leaves us clues, but at times, such as this, they are all but buried in evidence for the opposite side. Something is perceived by Mrs. Assingham:

There were moments, positively, . . . when, with the meeting of their eyes, something as yet unnameable came out for her in his look, when something strange and subtle and at variance with his words, something that gave them away, glimmered deep down, as an appeal, almost an incredible one, to her finer comprehension. . . . Wasn't it . . . fairly like a quintessential wink, a hint of the possibility of their really treating their subject . . . ? If this far red spark . . . was not, on her side . . . a mere subjective phenomenon, it twinkled there at the direct expense of what the Prince was inviting her to understand. (XXIII, 271; 286)

This sense, along with certain words and actions of Charlotte in this same scene, are what confirm in our minds that there is really something wrong going on. Yet in the outward appearance of the scene, in the explicit picture James gives us, we still feel Amerigo and Charlotte to be beautiful and charming. There is a definite and deliberate ambiguity about this scene: we see and feel the Prince's good faith and apparent innocence, yet simultaneously we feel doubt due to Mrs. Assingham's perceptions. Neither feeling really cancels out the other for the reader: we are forced by the evidence to juggle both.

Later, as the Prince thinks about his relationship with Charlotte, he is more realistic in formulating it and we cannot help but admire him for this: "'Did we do "everything to avoid" it when we faced your remarkable marriage?"' (XXIII, 290) he might have responded to Charlotte's

thoughts quoted on pages 51-52. The facing of Maggie's marriage was done by the Prince mainly only in his telegram to her, whose contents are disclosed to us long after the marriage has taken place: "'A la guerre comme à la guerre then. . . .We must lead our lives as we see them; but I am charmed with your courage and almost surprised at my own'" (XXIII, 290).⁵ It is significant that for Charlotte the telegram remained, in the words of the book, "ambiguous": she had thought of at least two meanings it might have had, which we are given (XXIII, 290-91). James makes it clear that Charlotte neither decided which meaning was correct nor questioned the Prince on it, indicating the ambiguity is unresolved, for her and for us. It is entirely possible that the message was ambiguous even to the Prince. This fact that the crucial telegram, on which Charlotte based her decision to marry Adam Verver, could have had either of two opposite meanings, is only one example of how James extends the ambiguity of his characters into certain key images or objects in the book.

The Prince's passivity continues as Charlotte mysteriously comes to visit him one rainy day. He is restless and bored, meditating on his abundance of time and lack of anything to fill it (XXIII, 291-92), deserted by Maggie and Mr. Verver for hours at a time, and we cannot help but feel sorry for his state. As he realizes Charlotte has entered the house, and waits to see if she will come up to him, his inspiration is to remain passive: "this thought of not interfering took

⁵ The ellipsis indicates the omission of narrative, not of the telegram, which is given complete. The entire telegram is italicized in the original, to set it off, presumably, from the rest of the text; I have underlined only the foreign words. The French phrase is idiomatic and has been translated for me roughly by a Frenchwoman as, "One cannot do much, but one should do what one can about it." This, of course, only adds to the ambiguity of the telegram.

on a sudden force for him" (XXIII, 296); he will go along with whatever happens. That is largely what he does during the rest of the scene as it builds up to the passionate kiss at the end: he follows as she leads him on and on until by the end of the scene they have completely changed their relationship by bringing it out in the open for the first time in the book. I think the Prince's passivity, largely ignored by critics, is certainly a weakness in him, but also partly accounts for "the innocence in the guilt"; thus it is ambiguous. In a sense the man cannot help himself: he is led on by whatever force is strong enough.

As the Prince continues to contemplate his new relationship with Charlotte, he expresses his "irritation" at his "falsity of position" in spending so much time with her and yet being expected to remain innocent:

What was supremely grotesque . . . was the essential opposition of theories [between himself and Maggie]--as if a galantuomo . . . could do anything but blush to 'go about' at such a rate with such a person as Mrs. Verver in a state of childlike innocence, the state of our primitive parents before the Fall. (XXIII, 335)

It may be a surprise that a "galantuomo" means a gentleman, a man of honor, a decent, respectable man; it does not mean, as might be expected, a gallant, with its connotations of court and attention paid to women. The fact that the Prince considers himself a perfect gentleman in being with Charlotte without innocence, shows us that indeed this really is a case of entirely different sets of values, as the Prince has earlier remarked (XXIII, 139). We can both blame the Prince for not conforming to his wife's values, and at the same time sympathize with him for not being able to. (The irony and ambiguity of the term "falsity of position" used in the sense the Prince does, are fascinating. At first

we would think he is recognizing his guilt, and his "false position" of innocence with Charlotte, but he reverses the term, using it to support his actual infidelity. Maggie--and we--would certainly tend to think of it in the first way.)

During the houseparty at Matcham the Prince wishes for "some still other and still greater beauty" than merely being there with her, for himself and Charlotte, yet still he does not act; it is Charlotte who acts, who arranges everything. He goes along with her plans willingly; nevertheless, we cannot help but think that if she were not there to do the arranging, their rendezvous at Gloucester would not go through. The fact that he tells her, "'You're terrible,'" (XXIII, 362) near the end of the scene, indicates that her competence in arranging, while pleasing in its effects, is rather frightening in and of itself. Amerigo's sense that a physical affair with Charlotte is a "beauty" indicates that his aesthetic sense is much stronger than his moral; he is still not aware of wrong-doing.

When in Volume XXIV we get largely into Maggie's mind, the Prince loses his spontaneity and some of our sympathy. This is natural, for we were bound to have more sympathy with him when we were in his mind. The Prince becomes less ambiguous: for one thing, we are certain, since Gloucester, of his guilt; for another, not being in his mind we do not see his reasons for his actions--those right reasons for the wrong acts which we have become accustomed to and which partly accounted for his ambiguity. Still, we are not altogether free from a double view of him even now.

On the negative side, Maggie sees and so we see the Prince "visibly uncertain" when he returns from Gloucester late and finds

Maggie uncharacteristically waiting for him (XXIV, 15-16). His being "puzzled" continues (XXIV, 27, 40); he and Charlotte begin "treating" Maggie differently (XXIV, 41-42); this only confirms our feeling of his guilt. Evidently at first he thinks all he has to do is make love to Maggie--he believes she will surrender to his charms (XXIV, 55-57, 59-60)--and this strikes us disagreeably, especially since Maggie perceives the danger of her succumbing and yet nearly does so. But as she does not, he continues to be puzzled and attracted by her, and she senses she is becoming important to him (XXIV, 141; XXIV, 178, 228). As the golden bowl and Maggie's knowledge of all it implies are revealed to the Prince, she senses he has a great "need" of her for the first time (XXIV, 186) which draws our sympathy to him. Even as he tries to explain the whole thing away (XXIV, 193-95), and tries to deny he did anything wrong (XXIV, 199), our sympathies have not entirely left him, for we are told how he is suffering. He especially suffers at Maggie's refusal to give him any hint as to whether or not her father knows of all this. When the Prince vows to her, "'You've never been more sacred to me than you were at that hour [when he was with Charlotte right before his marriage] --unless perhaps you've become so at this one'" (XXIV, 199), we can neither wholeheartedly accept this outpouring nor discount it: we feel both positive and negative toward it. The Prince means well but does not always act well; we do not know whether this vow comes from the lips or the heart. James has built up our ambiguous--i.e., mixed--feelings toward the Prince to the point that we cannot react wholly one way to anything he does or says.

Throughout the rest of the book we continue to see the Prince suffer: he is "a proud man reduced to abjection" (XXIV, 228), he

"helplessly groped" in a "grey medium" (XXIV, 281), he is in "fever" and "suspense" (XXIV, 337). Maggie perceives him as in a "prison," a "cage," a "monastic cell," "captivity," though she feels he is "lurking there by his own act and his own choice," unlike Charlotte (XXIV, 338). She realizes "his fear of her fifty ideas" (XXIV, 338, also 344), though in reality she knows she has only one (XXIV, 339). She "troubled," "mystified" him (XXIV, 344). We see just how much he has suffered in his famous line, "'Everything's terrible, cara--in the heart of man'" (XXIV, 349). "'If ever a man since the beginning of time acted in good faith--!'" (XXIV, 350), he follows it up with, and really the two statements seem linked. The "terrible"-ness and the "good faith" were all mixed together in him: acting throughout on "good faith," what was produced was "terrible."

The Prince's line about the terribleness in the heart of men is a kind of a summing up of what he--and we--have come to see. It is as if he finally recognizes he did wrong and perpetrated evil. But his statement, coming near the end, is not very reassuring. It is not the expected thing to rebuild a marriage on. It is linked both to the "pity and dread"--with its implication of tragedy--that Maggie experiences in the last line, and to his own jarring and out-of-place desire to confess everything to her in the final scene. It seems to add itself to the evidence that the ending is not "happy" or "triumphant" as some critics would have it.

In the last scene the Prince still does not seem wholly appealing, though many critics try to prove that he has learned his lesson, is one with Maggie, and happily beginning with her a new life. As he is about to enfold Maggie in an embrace, we are disheartened and disappointed

that he actually seems to think he ought to confess everything to her. After his incomparable discreteness and tact in the matter of not "telling" her--maintained for such a long time and a thing we admired him for--we feel his inclination to reveal all now, when there is less need than ever to do so, as positively gross. For Maggie, the possibility "charged her with a new horror: if that was her proper payment she would go without money" (XXIV, 368). We also feel uneasy as, standing close to her, ready to embrace her, the Prince still seems clearly not to understand Maggie: he is "taking in--or trying to--what she so wonderfully gave. He tried, too clearly, to please her--to meet her in her own way" (XXIV, 368-69). He is trying, poor fellow, but still does not seem to be on her wave-length. He does not understand what Maggie is trying to tell him about Charlotte. This line remains unexplained by critics who believe that he and Maggie have, at the end, come to a marvelous understanding. Another matter which adds to our uneasiness at these last lines is that when the Prince declares to his wife, "'See'? I see nothing but you,'" (XXIV, 369) his eyes are "so strangely lighted" by what he says that Maggie experiences "pity and dread of them" and cannot look at them. On this the book ends: it is hardly a triumphant conclusion.⁶

The Prince and Charlotte, then, resume their old affair only after their own marriages show themselves to be flawed. Some time has elapsed since each was married; they have had time, then, to see their respective problems. On the Prince's side, he is bored and has little to occupy

⁶ The last lines are quoted entirely in the Appendix; a reading of them might be helpful here. More will be said of Maggie and the Prince's new relationship in the last chapter.

his time. His position as a husband and a father has been usurped by Adam; the child, instead of being a link between the Prince and Maggie, is actually "a link between a mamma and a grandpapa" (XXIII, 156, 307). He does not understand certain aspects of his wife and father-in-law and the society in which he lives, and he feels that in certain ways they do not understand him and use him (the ways in which he is used are elaborated in the section on Adam, who thinks repeatedly of Amerigo in terms of buildings, cheques, etc.). On Charlotte's side, she has been made use of in two ways by Adam and Maggie: her presence is to ease Maggie's doubts about companionship for Adam, and she is to take over their social responsibility, leaving Maggie even more free to spend time with her father. Furthermore, Charlotte might be expected to be unhappy about her evident lack of a love life (see section on page 71), she who is so young and full of life, and, from the descriptions of her, not lacking in sensuality. Therefore, as Holland points out, Charlotte and the Prince cannot escape responsibility for what they do, but their position is made by the pressure of their spouses.⁷ Their relationship can be seen as a kind of defense against the relationship, equally real but of a different order, between Maggie and Adam.⁸

That relationship between Charlotte and the Prince is surely, as Elizabeth Stevenson perceives, full of "poetry."⁹ As she says, "One knows it to be a long-lived, thwarted, true relationship."¹⁰ Mrs.

⁷ Holland, p. 368.

⁸ See J. A. Ward, The Search for Form (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), p. 209.

⁹ Elizabeth Stevenson, The Crooked Corridor (New York: Macmillan, 1949), p. 91.

¹⁰ Stevenson, p. 91.

Lebowitz has a similar perception when she recognizes that the Prince and Charlotte demonstrate selfishness, but that "at the center" of their behavior is "the desire to be true to a relationship of long duration."¹¹ It is part of James' method of ambiguity to show this relationship as attractive and beautiful, for this makes it harder for us to judge it as wrong. It is wrong in its new circumstances, but we never lose the sense of its attractiveness. It would be too easy, after all, for us to judge as corrupt an affair which was presented as repulsive. The poetry in the relationship and the ugliness of the fact of the relationship thus demonstrate once more the "mixed motive" of life which James seeks to represent.¹²

¹¹ Lebowitz, p. 66.

¹² Krook, The Ordeal, p. 291, feels it necessary to discredit the relationship between the Prince and Charlotte, because it is evil in spite of Maggie's and Adam's guilt. But she fails to see it is evil simply because it hurts the others, who had so much trust and faith in the Prince and Charlotte. It is not necessary to find fault with the relationship itself, and, in any case, Miss Krook's attempt to do so does not succeed. See also Chapter I of my text for a discussion of this relationship.

CHAPTER III

"AND . . . GUILT IN THE INNOCENCE": MAGGIE AND ADAM

Maggie

Maggie is unquestionably the heroine of the book, and demands our sympathy as an innocent, trusting wife who is betrayed by her husband and her best friend. On the positive side, she is praised by all the other characters in both sections of the book. Her goodness, meekness and high intentions are in ample evidence in the first volume. After her discovery that her husband is having an affair with her best friend and father's wife, her goodness is evidenced in her refusal to ask the Prince for a confession or her lack of desire to know all the sordid details, and in her refusal to make violent scenes and bring everything out into the open. She feels it is best for everyone that she work quietly and carefully. It is just these examples of her goodness, however, which make her at times disagreeable to the reader and give her an "inhuman quality."¹ Also, at times these same "good" qualities seem to slide imperceptibly into the "evil" ones of manipulation and desire for power. Maggie's faults of innocence-ignorance and unconscious using of people in Volume XXIII, become those of over-crafty knowledge and conscious manipulation of people in Volume XXIV.

Other positive facts about Maggie are that she is "fruitful" enough to be the only character in James to have a baby,² and that her suffering

¹ Bayley, p. 229.

² Nuhn, p. 153 points this out.

gives her insight into Charlotte's suffering ("I see it's always terrible for women" XXIV, 349) and pity for her. However, she is a co-author of Charlotte's "doom" and suffering (along with Adam and the Prince), and it is clear she feels some jealousy toward that lady and wants her out of the way. Too, in order to get her husband back she is forced to lie, dissemble, and manipulate appearances, but this fact does not make her evil, contrary to what some critics believe. She is forced to these methods as the only ones which will accomplish her goal, but it is true that at times she seems to enjoy her duplicity, and it is this relish which we much condemn. Maggie's ambiguity is perhaps more subtle than that of any other character.

Part of what makes us dislike Maggie is her attitude toward the Prince. She and her father both regard him as an object, a convenience. Adam is the one who thinks in these terms again and again, as we shall see, but Maggie is the first to voice this attitude: "'You're at any rate a part of his collection . . . one of the things that can only be got over here. You're a rarity, an object of beauty, an object of price. . . . You're what they call a morceau de musée'" (XXIII, 12). A second disturbing attitude toward the Prince is her evident preference for his history rather than himself:

'Oh I'm not afraid of history! . . . What was it else . . . that made me originally think of you? It wasn't-- as I should suppose you must have seen--what you call your unknown quantity, your particular self. It was the generations behind you, the follies and the crimes, the plunder and the waste--the wicked Pope, the monster most of all' (XXIII, 9-10)

In a time of trial, when Maggie doubts the Prince and fears greatly for the future, she is consoled by a visit to the British Museum, the afternoon spent reading in the history of the Prince's family (XXIV, 149-50,

155-56).

Charlotte perceives that Maggie "adores" her husband but doesn't "think" of him: "'This is just how she adores him'" (XXIII, 257). Charlotte is correct in realizing that Maggie takes her husband for granted, believes he is there only for her purposes, and does not know she must work for his love. This attitude is closely related to her thinking of him as an "object." As Maggie realizes the possibility of her losing her husband, James multiplies the references to her love and desire for him. Though we do not doubt the reality of this love, we still wonder as to its order and whether it doesn't contain some selfishness. As to this we are never certain.

Another disagreeable quality is Maggie's innocence, disagreeable simply because there is so much of it. It is closely related both to her attachment to her father and her curious attitudes to her husband. She admits she has never suffered (XXIII, 186); it almost seems she explicitly says she does not want to when, speaking of the fact that Charlotte has loved and lost, says, "'I wouldn't in any case have let her tell me what would have been dreadful to me. For such wounds and shames are dreadful: at least . . . I suppose they are; for what, as I say, do I know of them? I don't want to know!'"--she spoke quite with vehemence" (XXIII, 187). Her innocence, then, seems almost willful; she seems to be pushing away knowledge of life with averted eyes. It is Maggie's incredible innocence that leads Mrs. Assingham to state that there are certain things which Maggie must never be told: "'She'd be so frightened. She'd be . . . so hurt. She wasn't born to know evil. She must never know it'" (XXIII, 78), though once Maggie finds it out Mrs. Assingham reverses her position and realizes that this is best: "'Her

sense will have to open.'" "'To the very, very wrong,'" her husband supplies. "'To what's called Evil--with a very big E: for the first time in her life. To the discovery of it, to the knowledge of it, to the crude experience of it. . . .To the harsh bewildering brush, the daily chilling breath of it,'" Mrs. Assingham elucidates (XXIII, 384-85).

Maggie does finally lose her innocence when she experiences

the horror of finding evil seated all at its ease where she had only dreamed of good; the horror of the thing hideously behind, behind so much trusted, so much pretended, nobleness, cleverness, tenderness. It was the first sharp falsity she had known in her life, to touch at all or be touched by; it had met her like some bad-faced stranger surprised in one of the thick-carpeted corridors of a house of quiet on a Sunday afternoon. (XXIV, 237)

Here it is precisely the evil hidden in the good that Maggie has to face up to. James' image of the bad-faced stranger in the lovely old house perfectly parallels his meaning: the evil within the good, where you least expect it. The bad-faced stranger never has to be faced if he stays where he belongs, in the foul and low places, but when he comes into one's own home, he must be dealt with. But later we see that it was the very excess of good which made Maggie suspicious that the evil was within: "'The thing I've known best of all is that you've never wanted together to offend us,'" she says to the Prince of himself and Charlotte. "'You've wanted quite intensely not to, and the precautions you've had to take for it have been for a long time one of the strongest of my impressions. That, I think, . . . is the way I've best known'" (XXIV, 199-200). Thus the good and evil show themselves to be so wound together as hardly to be separable.

It is their innocence which causes Maggie's and Adam's blindness, and their not knowing how to live. As Mrs. Assingham puts it, "'These

people clearly didn't see them [their lives] for themselves--didn't see them at all. . . . They were making a mess of such charming material . . . they were but wasting it and letting it go. They didn't know how to live" (XXIII, 388-89). Maggie is explicit that one reason she "gets" Charlotte is just that she would help them to live: "'But will Charlotte Stant . . . make us grander?'" Mr. Verver asks; "'Yes, I think. Really grander,'" replies Maggie (XXIII, 180). (See also pp. 103-108 in Adam's section.)

Maggie and Mr. Verver, of course, wish to use Charlotte in another way as well: by marrying Adam, she is to relieve Maggie of all feelings of guilt at having "neglected" her father by her own marriage. These two ways in which Charlotte is "used" by Maggie and Adam will be dealt with at more length in the section on the latter, for it is in his words that the best examples of their using her are found. As for Maggie, she does finally realize how she has been using Charlotte, on the same evening of her realization that her husband is having an affair with that lady. She compares Charlotte with a horse pulling her carriage, and a servant:

They two [Maggie and her father] had sat at home in peace, the Principino between them, the complications of life kept down, the bores sifted out, the large ease of the home preserved, because of the way the others held the field and braved the weather. Amerigo never complained--any more than for that matter Charlotte did; but she seemed to see to-night as she had never yet quite done that their business of social representation, conceived as they conceived it, beyond any conception of her own and conscientiously carried out, was an affair of living always in harness. (XXIV, 22)

Here Maggie denies that she desired the others to do so much for her, that they did so because they felt it their duty; nevertheless, she allowed them to live in harness, and she sees that "it had been for all

the world as if Charlotte had been 'had in,' as the servants always said of extra help" because their "family coach" had only three wheels and needed another (XXIV, 23). With Charlotte as the fourth, the strain is all off Maggie and she doesn't have to do any of the work of pulling: "Somehow Amerigo and Charlotte were pulling it while she and her father were not so much as pushing. They were seated inside together . . . so that the exertion was all with the others" (XXIV, 23-24). Finally she sees herself "suddenly jump from the coach" (XXIV, 24), i.e., she refuses to continue using them and allowing them to use her. Though she does stop using them in the ways she had, it is open to question whether she really does stop manipulating Charlotte or anyone else.

Maggie's innocence, her too intense devotion to her father, and her tendency to "use" both her husband and Charlotte--all combine to cause her part of the guilt in the unhappy situation. Mrs. Assingham puts it extremely well:

'Maggie had in the first place to make up to her father for her having suffered herself to become . . . so intensely married. Then she had to make up to her husband for taking so much of the time they might otherwise have spent together to make this reparation to Mr. Verver perfect. And her way to this, precisely, was by allowing the Prince the use, the enjoyment, whatever you may call it, of Charlotte to cheer his path . . . in proportion as she herself, making sure her father was all right, might be missed from his side. By so much, at the same time, however, . . . as she took her young stepmother, for this purpose, away from Mr. Verver, by just so much did this too strike her as something again to be made up for.' (XXIII, 394-95)

It is true, as she says, that Maggie "'began the vicious circle'" (XXIII, 394): "'her little scruples and her little lucidities, which were really so divinely blind--her feverish little sense of justice . . . --had brought the two others together as her grossest misconduct couldn't have done'" (XXIII, 396). Thus Maggie's good has actually been not only the cause of evil but itself an inverted good which actually turned into

evil. This is the very core of the ambiguity and illustrates James' main point that good and evil are not only inextricably bound up together, but are also causally related: where one is, it seems to foster the growth of the other.

To return to Maggie's devotion to her father, we find it so intense as to be downright unnatural and perverse, and ultimately to be part of her negative side. This affection actually does not diminish at the end, contrary to critics who insist Maggie has renounced her father emotionally as well as in the flesh. The fact that at the end her feelings toward him seem not to have changed make us question whether she has really matured as much as some think. I have found only one critic, Firebaugh, who realizes the extent of Maggie's wish to hang on to her father.³

At one point Maggie actually describes herself as being married to her father before she was married to Amerigo: "'It was as if you couldn't be in the market when you were married to me,'" she tells him. "'Or rather as if I kept people off, innocently, by being married to you. Now that I'm married to someone else you're, as in consequence, married to nobody'" (XXIII, 172). Once Adam marries Charlotte, Maggie spends even more time with her father than before; Charlotte perceives that "'the result of our separate households is really, for them, more contact and more intimacy'" (XXIII, 259). Maggie has rooms for herself and her child at her father's house; keeps clothes, "'all sorts of things,'" there; "'dresses really . . . as much for her father--and she always did--as for her husband or for herself'" (XXIII, 373-74), we learn from Mrs. Assingham.

³ Firebaugh, p. 401.

When Maggie has her realization that her husband is not all hers, she also comes to see that it is in fact linked to her own possessiveness toward her father: "She had surrendered herself to her husband without the shadow of a reserve or a condition and yet hadn't all the while given up her father by the least little inch" (XXIV, 5). Now that she has discovered what she has been doing wrong, we expect that she will quietly detach herself from her father, yet a careful reading of the text reveals this is not the case. She does express, again and again, her love and desire for Amerigo (XXIV, 18-19, 20, 21-22); perhaps this is the first time she has felt it so deeply. Yet her feelings for her father seem to remain unchanged. Her primary motivation in not bringing her knowledge out into the open is not to save her husband's pride, but to save her father from her own knowledge (XXIII, 386, 396-97, 402).

At least Maggie recognizes that she and her father may have to separate physically--for she sees the need (XXIV, 74). Shortly after this recognition, however, possessiveness overtakes her once more, when she has "one of her abrupt arrests of consistency": she thinks of "the particular difference his marriage had made," *i.e.*, "the loss . . . of their old freedom" (XXIV, 80). She actually goes so far as to groan inwardly, "'Why did he marry? ah, why did he?'" (XXIV, 80). But when she thinks how he did it all for her--she does not even think of Charlotte. But soon her selfish thoughts turn into more noble ones, as she realizes if her father did indeed marry for his daughter, it was she who made him feel he must do so, it was she who could not leave him alone, who was overly-anxious about him (XXIV, 81).

Maggie's thoughts about her father reverse themselves here almost faster than the mind can follow. Her tenderness for him turns into a

hard-headedness, as she coolly contemplates sacrificing him: "she asked herself if it weren't thinkable, from the perfectly practical point of view, that she should simply sacrifice him" (XXIV, 82). She even imagines him as a lamb, begging her to do so. At this stage, she thinks of him "almost as much like her child . . . as like her parent" (XXIV, 82): this condescension befits her readiness to send him to his slaughter. James deliberately makes Maggie's feelings toward her father ambiguous--she vacillates several times during these few pages. It is strange that some 25 pages later the idea of "sacrificing him" is a "forbidden issue" for her (XXIV, 107), and in 160 more pages she is sacrificing him once more (see p.84 of this study).

Even after Maggie realizes her marriage is threatened, she is still selfishly asserting that her father married Charlotte and did everything for her, his daughter (XXIV, 170); her insistence seems odd at this point. Mrs. Assingham helps her to see that, if indeed it is true, it was the very thing that caused Charlotte to resort to the Prince (XXIV, 170, 172-73). Maggie also becomes aware that her father thought too much of her and not enough of Charlotte when he decided to marry--not enough, that is, of Charlotte's possible "selfishness" toward him (XXIV, 174). Even here Maggie does not think in terms of Charlotte's right to her husband's affection, but in terms of her selfishness in wanting it. Maggie's attitude toward her father is clearly not that of simple devotion or unselfish desire for his happiness.

Toward the end of the climactic scene in which Maggie and Amerigo have their confrontation over the golden bowl, it is Adam who seems still to be dominating her mind: "her care for his serenity, or at any rate for the firm outer shell of his dignity" is still "her paramount

law" (XXIV, 202-03). Though this seems unselfish enough on the surface, it is actually very strange coming in what is perhaps the most crucial scene in the book as far as the future of her marriage is concerned. One would imagine her "paramount law" at such a time would be concerned with her husband or her marriage.

Just as we are feeling great sympathy with Maggie as Charlotte captures her on the terrace one evening, James plays one of his tricks: he reverses our feelings by showing us Maggie's negative side. As Charlotte makes Maggie look from outside at the others playing cards in the smoking room, the latter feels a strong possessiveness toward her father and a jealousy of Charlotte for the affection he feels for her. These emotions in Maggie really seem rather perverse and abnormal, coming as they do so far into the book and so long after she has been concentrating her efforts on keeping her husband. We might think she would have matured beyond childish possessiveness and jealousy of her father, in her fight for her husband. We are told, "Not yet since his marriage had Maggie so sharply and so formidably known her old possession of him as a thing divided and contested. She was looking at him by Charlotte's leave and under Charlotte's direction" (XXIV, 244). She has a "wild wish" that her father would look up and "make some sign . . . that would save her; save her from being the one this way to pay all. He might somehow show a preference--distinguishing between them [Maggie and Charlotte]" (XXIV, 245). Though Maggie believes that this was her "one little lapse from consistency" (XXIV, 245) in all her actions so far, we see others in this very scene (see my text pp. 92-93). Maggie still can scarcely give up her father, though critics who defend her seem to think she gave him up at the same time she realized her husband was slipping away from her. Also,

her jealousy of Charlotte for an affection that is completely within the latter's rights, is hardly more defensible than Charlotte's own sin. The qualities James disliked are fairly evenly distributed among the characters, and not merely at the beginning of the book, but throughout.

In the third park scene, the second at Fawns, their country house, Maggie shows again her infantile desire to retreat into the protection or companionship of her father, not to expand outward and grow but to regress. As she and Adam prepare to go off alone to converse, she thinks of the "felicity of their being once more . . . simply daughter and father" (XXIV, 254-55). She imagines that it is "wonderfully like their having got together into some boat and paddled off from the shore where husbands and wives, luxuriant complications, made the air too tropical. In the boat they were father and daughter," and she further wonders something which is hard to interpret: "Why, into the bargain, for that matter . . . couldn't they always live, so far as they lived together, in a boat? . . . They needed only know each other henceforth in the unmarried relation" (XXIV, 255). This seems to be a fantasizing on Maggie's part, a wish to leave behind the complications which Amerigo and Charlotte have brought into her life, which can only be fulfilled when with her father, for only with him can she delude herself that everything is as it used to be. Again, though this reaction is perhaps to some extent natural, it represents fear and negation of growth. Maggie even thinks that she can make this park scene resemble the other which took place at Fawns long ago when her father was not married. Her thoughts on this end with the statement: "They had after all whatever happened, always and ever each other; each other--that was the hidden treasure and the saving truth--to do exactly what they would with: a provision full of possibilities" (XXIV,

255). This is another unfortunate assumption on Maggie's part: in the first place, she and her father do not have this complete freedom with each other, for each one's spouse must come first; in the second place, such complete possession by one human being of another is impossible and unhealthy.

During that talk Maggie rightly recognizes her own selfishness--for Amerigo. This kind of selfishness is natural, however, and forgivable. A little later, though, she describes herself as "'frozen stiff with selfishness'" with reference to her father (XXIV, 265). "'You've been my victim,'" she tells him. "'What have you done, ever done, that hasn't been for me?'" (XXIV, 266). It is true, as she says, that she has been selfish to let her father do so much for her; but she is also selfish in wishing to possess him, and this she does not recognize. Next her old preoccupation of sacrificing him comes up again: she tells him "'I sacrifice you'" (XXIV, 267). It is actually Amerigo she is sacrificing him to, though she does not say this (XXIV, 267-69). As she avoids speaking out the whole situation, she has this definite impression of her father: "He was doing what he had steadily been coming to; he was practically offering himself, pressing himself upon her, as a sacrifice . . . ; and where had she already for weeks and days past planted her feet if not on her acceptance of the offer?" (XXIV, 269). Just as before their second park scene in London, she imagines his offering himself to sacrifice, so she does here, and what is more, she clearly accepts his offer. Again, these thoughts of giving him up to lead his own life do not seem consistent with her recurrent desire to possess him. Here is another ambiguity, her vacillation between her husband and her father, her inability to give either up in spite of her evident sense that she cannot have both.

When Mr. Verver tells her of his idea of going to America with Charlotte, her reaction is significant: the idea "dazzled her," it is like a "blur of light"; she saw Charlotte "by contrast in blackness, saw her waver in the field of vision, saw her removed, transported, doomed" (XXIV, 271). Her first thought, then, is of Charlotte away, suffering, punished; not a vision of bliss, herself alone with her husband. Also, it is she and only she who thinks of Charlotte as "doomed" throughout the rest of the book.

Maggie also demonstrates her self-centeredness in this conversation by expressing her thought that "she had made him [her father] do it all for her" (XXIV, 272), never considering that perhaps he is doing it for himself, Charlotte, and Amerigo as well. It is hard for the reader, at any rate, to be as convinced as she is that Mr. Verver's motivation is entirely for Maggie, especially since we have no proof that he is aware of his wife's affair with his daughter's husband. The idea that she made him do it is just another outgrowth of her power-seeking mind.

But her sense of her power over him rapidly diminishes as her father shows his aggravation at her declaration of "sacrificing" him. The remarks he makes, including a denial that he is being sacrificed, cause him to "loom larger than life" for her (XXIV, 273); she feels she sees his true significance, and sees he is greater than her recent words took account of. From a feeling of power and superiority over her father she rapidly changes to a feeling of his superiority. Her enthusiasm for her new insight here at the end of the scene causes her to declare, "'I believe in you more than anyone'" (XXIV, 275). He questions her on this but she remains firm. She informs him that she thinks he believes the same about her; but here Adam Verver tries to tell his daughter something, and tells the reader as well. He hesitates: that is enough of a sign

right there. His reply finally is: "'About the way--yes'" (XXIV, 275). He seems to be telling Maggie to grow up, to leave him to lead his life while she leads hers. For he is still obviously the most important man in her life and he evidently realizes this and knows it is wrong. In any case, Maggie does not catch the undercurrent of meaning which comes across to the reader. For all her perception, she still has her blindnesses.

In a conversation with Mrs. Assingham Maggie recognizes that she will "get off"--i.e., succeed in her entire plan--by giving up her father (XXIV, 334). Their following remarks are very revealing:

'But if he gives you [up]?' Mrs. Assingham presumed to object. 'Doesn't it moreover then . . . complete the very purpose with which he married--that of making you and leaving you more free?'

Maggie looked at her long. 'Yes--I help him to do that.'

Mrs. Assingham hesitated, but at last her bravery flared. 'Why not call it then frankly his complete success?'

'Well,' said Maggie, 'that's all that's left me to do.'
(XXIV, 334)

Mrs. Assingham is trying to get Maggie to give up her father then and there, as the young woman has just admitted she has done. But Maggie makes it clear she is not ready quite yet. She cannot yet call the final situation his success because she cannot accept his freedom along with her own.

Entertaining her father on the eve of his departure to America, the last thing Maggie says to him in the book is, "'It's success, father'" (XXIV, 366). It would seem from this alone that Maggie has reconciled herself to giving up her father, especially when a physical parting is imminent. Yet it is also possible she has really seen her father already has his own life and already has "given up" her. He and his wife seem together, united, in this last meeting with his daughter and son-in-law;

to Maggie "they were somehow conjoined in it, conjoined for a present effect as Maggie had absolutely never yet seen them" (XXIV, 357).

She also notices that as she and her father praise Charlotte, Adam exclaims, "'She's beautiful, beautiful!'", and Maggie's "sensibility reported to her the shade of a new note. It was . . . the note of possession and control" (XXIV, 365). Though she believes these signs of her father's independence relieve her and make her happy, it is still possible that she allows these emotions only because she knows the end is near. In any case, Maggie definitely does not let go of her father until the last scene. This fact is somehow missed by all critics except Firebaugh. So tenaciously does she hold on to her father that it is possible she would not have let him go if he had stayed in England. Perhaps he realized this and knew this was why he must go.

There are other things that are unappealing in this last conversation between Maggie and her father. These two seem horribly, unbelievably, still to be looking at their sposi as "objects." As they gaze at Maggie's home, filled with art objects and beautiful furniture, for the last time together, their gaze takes in Charlotte and Amerigo:

The two noble persons seated in conversation and at tea fell thus into the splendid effect and the general harmony: Mrs. Verver and the Prince fairly 'placed' themselves, however unwittingly, as high expressions of the kind of human furniture required aesthetically by such a scene. The fusion of their presence with the decorative elements, their contribution to the triumph of selection, was complete and admirable; though to a lingering view, a view more penetrating than the occasion really demanded, they also might have figured as concrete attestations of a rare power of purchase. (XXIV, 360)

Adam Verver's reaction, with its blatant double meaning, is, "'You've got some good things'" (XXIV, 360). Maggie's reply is no better: "'Ah

don't they look well?'" (XXIV, 360). The sposi, at this, give them "an attention . . . that was like an ampler submission to the general duty of magnificence; sitting as still, to be thus appraised, as a pair of effigies of the contemporary great on one of the platforms of Madame Tussaud" (XXIV, 360-61). There are several points about this exchange that are worth attention. Adam and Maggie still lump Charlotte and Amerigo with their possessions, evidently, in spite of all they have been through and supposedly have learned. Charlotte and the Prince "submit" to this: their "duty" is to be "magnificent"; thus it would appear they continue to consent to being used. Finally, the comparison between the sposi and "effigies" in a wax museum is disturbing. James used his images carefully, and we cannot suppose that he employed this one without being aware of the effect. The representation of Charlotte and Amerigo as lifeless lumps of wax on display only intensifies the general feeling in this passage that Maggie and Adam still look upon them as part of their "collection." Wax models are also generally made, I believe, only after the death of the original.⁴

One other thing which arouses our suspicion during this conversation is Maggie's awareness of her own sincerity. As she proclaims Charlotte "'incomparable,'" there is "a felt sincerity in her words. She felt her sincerity absolutely sound" (XXIV, 363). As Ferner Nuhn has remarked,⁵ her thinking how sincere she is immediately makes us suspicious that she is not. At best, this thought still strikes us as overly self-conscious.

⁴ The implications of this image have not been mentioned by any critic I have read.

⁵ Nuhn, p. 157.

The faults that we have found with Maggie up to this point include her innocence and consequent ignorance (which she overcomes), her too intense devotion to her father, and her tendency to use her husband and Charlotte. There is another fault which she has, perhaps more serious than any of the others, and this is her tendency to manipulate. This tendency is exercised only after she has begun to suffer, and though it is perhaps a natural reaction for one in her situation, nevertheless it keeps her from being that Christ-figure which some critics see in her. Its scope and the forms it takes truly make it part of her evil, or Machiavellian, side.

Entertaining at her home a group of guests who had also attended the house-party at Matcham at which Charlotte and the Prince were very much together, Maggie "rose . . . to the desire to possess and use them, even to the extent of braving, of fairly defying, of directly exploiting, of possibly quite enjoying, under cover of an evil duplicity, the felt element of curiosity with which they regarded her" (XXIV, 49). She contemplates that these people "she might still live to drive about like a flock of sheep" (XXIV, 51-52). Besides her willingness to sacrifice her father that we have already seen, she finds that she "would verily at this crisis have seen Mrs. Assingham's personal life or liberty sacrificed without a pang (XXIV, 101).⁶

Maggie has a "plan infernally to promote" (XXIV, 108)--to send Charlotte and the Prince off together on another weekend visit: "'I wanted to see if they would'" (XXIV, 113). She has complicated explanations for her plan: Charlotte and Amerigo "'move . . . between . . .

⁶ She gloats over her "using" Mrs. Assingham later also (XXIV, 145). At this time she is pictured as "as hard . . . as a little pointed diamond," an image which hardly presents her as lovable.

[the danger] of their doing too much and that of their not having any longer the confidence or the nerve, or whatever you may call it, to do enough.'" She sums up, rather triumphantly, "'And that's how I make them do what I like!'" (XXIV, 115). To Mrs. Assingham, as to us, she has become "'terrible'" (XXIV, 115); this kind of manipulating is frightening. But the very next words of Maggie illustrate her and James' ambiguity: she can "'bear anything'"--"'for love,'" these two words repeated three times (XXIV, 115-16). From fear and repulsion of her we are forced to admiration and sympathy in a moment: such is the nature of the innocence in the guilt and of James' ambiguity.

We see Maggie lie to Mrs. Assingham at the end of this scene: the latter has lied by saying there is nothing between the Prince and Charlotte; Maggie lies in telling her she believes this, though her tears show her real belief (XXIV, 120). But Mrs. Assingham later explains that to lie to Maggie is to lie for her (XXIV, 122-23)--i.e., everyone knows the real truth, but the situation calls for silence and all will be helped by acting as if nothing is wrong (XXIV, 130-31). This accounts for Maggie's own lie. Thus James illustrates the ambiguity that exists for even such a seemingly "wrong" act as a lie: it may be for good, it may help the forces of good.

The scene in which Maggie displays the golden bowl to her husband and informs him of her knowledge is another occasion when we begin to wonder about her power and be frightened at her manipulation. She perceives, and rather coldly when it comes down to it, that he is "fairly writhing in his pain" (XXIV, 193). Maggie refuses to tell the Prince whether her father knows what she knows; this is almost unbearable for him and she knows it. When he finally brings himself to ask her whether

anyone else knows, her answer, after deliberation during which the suspense builds up, is "'Find out for yourself!'" (XXIV, 203). Her refusal to enlighten her husband is a ground for at least one critic to call her cruel;⁷ but perhaps it is more her method of refusing that is the real cruelty. Maggie deliberately creates suspense, and when she knows he is suffering: she utters half-sentences which lead the Prince to believe she will give him his answer, she pauses, then the finished sentence uttered has the effect of his coming up against a blank wall.

Immediately after this scene in the book (though some days later, we are told), she thinks back over the recent happenings in these extraordinary terms: "She was having . . . the time of her life" (XXIV, 207). In the paragraph which follows we are led to think that the knowledge of her husband and Charlotte that she finally possesses, the "duplicity" which she recognizes she is employing, the "humbugging," the acting, the "dissimulating," are all somehow enjoyable. This is not stated, but implied in the phrase quoted above. It is certainly unusual that someone who is suffering as much as she could think of her situation in this way. The terms in which she puts her experience suggest that it is exhilarating, and adventure--along with its being dangerous, risky, and the stakes being high.

It is extraordinary, too, that shortly after her crucial confrontation with the Prince she still expects to find perfect happiness. She still wants Paradise, even though it is after the Fall. "'I want a happiness without a hole in it big enough for you to poke in your finger,'" says Maggie. "'The golden bowl--as it was to have been. . . .The bowl with all our happiness in it. The bowl without the crack'" (XXIV, 216-

⁷ Jefferson, Henry James and the Modern Reader, pp. 223-24.

17). Critics often cite this speech as an example of Maggie's naive view before maturity, but actually she is making it at a time when we would think she would have become realistic. If she is going to grow up, surely she would have by now. At the end of the book, since she has not indicated a change of view, we presume she still believes in the bowl without a crack but we wonder more than ever how such a marriage could exist under the given circumstances. It seems that the same selfishness and blindness which characterized Maggie at the beginning of the book will carry over to the end in her desire to possess perfection in an imperfect world. She is being unrealistic.

Maggie's sense of power is nowhere more clearly expressed than when she experiences "exaltation" at the Prince's "tacit vow . . . to abide without question by whatever she should be able to achieve or think fit to prescribe" (XXIV, 228). She feels that she has passed "from being nothing for him to being all"; she envisions him as "a proud man reduced to abjection" and as full of "beauty" because full of "humility" (XXIV, 228). Though disagreeable, these are probably natural thoughts for a person in Maggie's circumstances: they show her to be a struggling human being, still full of pride and of desire for power, if still suffering; they do not show her as a savior, a redeemer, or a Christ-figure.

Maggie's sense of power continues into the beginning of the bridge-game scene. Sitting watching her father, her husband, Charlotte, and Mrs. Assingham play cards, she imagines they are "wondering . . . if she weren't really watching them from her corner and consciously . . . holding them in her hand" (XXIV, 232). During a very suspenseful moment, she actually contemplates verbalizing everything just to prove her power:

She found herself for five minutes thrilling with the idea of the prodigious effect that, just as she sat

there near them, she had at her command; with the sense that if she were but different--oh ever so different!--all this high decorum would hang by a hair. There reigned for her absolutely during these vertiginous moments that fascination of the monstrous, that temptation of the horribly possible. . . .Springing up under her wrong and making them all start, stare and turn pale, she might sound out their doom in a single sentence. (XXIV, 233)

After this temptation has left her, she thinks of the "opportunity" in terms of an assault, "as a beast might have leaped at her throat" (XXIV, 235). This is the beast within, as in James' famous story "The Beast in the Jungle,"⁸ and indeed in most of his work: the evil, the temptation to cruelty and destruction, are not external, but the internal sins of pride, selfishness, and blindness.

Immediately after this temptation leaves Maggie we have unmistakable religious imagery applied to her conspicuously.⁹ She sees herself as a "scapegoat of old . . . charged with the sins of the people and . . . gone forth into the desert to sink under his burden and die" (XXIV, 234)--only she realizes the others don't want her to die, but rather to live, which will make them feel secure. Again, this juxtaposing of good with evil is James' method of showing the ambiguity in Maggie and in existence. The religious imagery need not be taken as

⁸ The "beast" in "The Beast in the Jungle" is, in my reading, Marcher's turning away from May Bartram, or his failure to love her and realize her love for him. It is caused, however, by his selfishness, egotism, and ignorant cruelty--so those qualities are really part of the "beast." The causes of Marcher's beast are the same as the causes of Maggie's.

⁹ There was previously religious imagery applied to her in the scene in which she confronts Amerigo with the golden bowl (XXIV, 153). We also saw the religious imagery in the scene in which Charlotte and Amerigo kiss. Religious imagery is not conclusive proof that the person it is applied to is a Christ-figure.

James' indication that Maggie is a "savior," for such a reading would be to ignore all the evidence on the other side. One moment Maggie is cruel, the next an angel--she is neither exclusively, and so she is both. James even gives us a visual image of this juxtaposition and intermixture in Maggie, in this scene in which we see both her good and evil aspects. Out on the terrace at night, windows open on it from the house causing the light to come out "in vague shafts" (XXIV, 235), and the alternation of light and dark, light and dark, echoes the alternation of benevolence and cruelty in Maggie, much as the alternating black and white floor tiles in James' story "The Jolly Corner" give a visual image to the duality-yet-unity of the narrator and his maimed alter ego.

Moments after Maggie is visualized as the scapegoat, her tendency to manipulate returns in her sense of herself as the author of the actions of these people. She imagines her companions as "figures rehearsing some play of which she herself was the author" (XXIV, 235). No matter what mystery they might be representing, "the key to the mystery, the key that could wind and unwind it without a snap of the spring, was there in her pocket" (XXIV, 236). As she looks at the empty drawing-room she contemplates "all the possibilities she controlled" (XXIV, 236). The room is "a scene she might people, by the press of her spring, either with serenities and dignities and decencies, or with terrors and shames and ruins" (XXIV, 236). This is really extraordinary, her contemplating her power in such terms. Her sense of power dissolves, however, as Charlotte pursues and virtually captures her, showing her the smoking-room scene and taking her into the empty drawing-room as if she were the one in power. Maggie's terror and sense of Charlotte's own power cause the pendulum to swing again, and once more we have sympathy

with Maggie (XXIV, 247).

Maggie, at the end of this scene, lies again. Charlotte drives her to it, by asking if she has wronged the Princess. Maggie is helped in her lie by her knowledge that Amerigo lied to Charlotte first, and this mutuality of lies draws her close to the Prince, at the same time it places Charlotte far off. She feels her "abasement" at having lied to Charlotte, but nevertheless feels certain that "she had kept in tune with the right" which "took this extraordinary from of humbugging . . . to the end. It was only a question of not by a hair's breadth deflecting into the truth" (XXIV, 250-51). Critics who attack Maggie cite this passage, but I think it is clear that James knew the ambiguity of lying. His was not an orthodox morality which said that truth was always right and a lie always wrong or evil. In this scene Maggie has no choice but to lie, in order to save everybody. Besides, James indicates that both she and Charlotte are conscious both of their own and the other's lies, as a careful reading of the scene will show. One disagreeable thing about Maggie is that she does rather overdo her lie; she piles it up like blocks, as the imagery at one point indicates (XXIV, 249). Though the lie itself is not wrong in this case, one wonders about her method of elaborating it. Possibly it is her only defense, in this scene in which she is the most frightened and abject in the entire book.¹⁰

After this scene Maggie does not do much manipulating--indeed, she does not need to, for the situation is on its way to being solved:

¹⁰For the last of Maggie's major lies, see pp. 314-18 of Vol. XXIV. In this case, too, she does it for the good of all, particularly to save Charlotte's face. She is so convincing in her lie that Robert Marks believes she is telling the truth that she has actually opposed Adam's marriage to Charlotte. Though there is too much evidence in the text that Maggie is deliberately lying, her primary question to Charlotte, "'You want to take my father from me?'" (316) has its grain of truth.

she is getting her husband back. There is one exception, however, and this occurs close to the end of the book. Maggie refuses to let the Prince tell Charlotte that he and his wife have lied to her: "'She isn't to know'" (XXIV, 356). When the Prince asks whether it isn't his "right to correct her--?", Maggie uses "the very first clear majesty he had known her to use." "'Correct' her?" she asks; "'Aren't you rather forgetting who she is?'" (XXIV, 356). Her further orders of "'Come!'" and "'Go'" (XXIV, 356) intensify his feeling of her "majesty." Though we can understand that the Prince in fact does not have the "right" to "correct" Charlotte, we nevertheless might wish that Maggie would allow her to be put out of the torment of not-knowing. This conversation takes place immediately before their last meeting with Adam and Charlotte on the eve of the latter's departure to America; Charlotte has suffered so much by this time that we might suppose Maggie would wish to do something to lessen it. But evidently she still enjoys her power and means to use it over her former rival.

A word about the pity which Maggie feels for Charlotte is called for. Maggie's pity is mentioned several times late in the book, but actually it is only as she becomes certain that she has "won"--i.e., that Charlotte is to go to America and she herself is to keep the Prince--that she experiences pity and compassion. Certainly the pity is real, but one wonders if it is simply an emotion Maggie can afford to feel now that her rival no longer threatens her. Certainly it is not the Christ-like unfailing compassion in spite of what one is suffering oneself, that certain critics suggest. Maggie felt no pity for Charlotte, but only relief for herself, when she imagined her "off in some darkness of space that would steep her in solitude and harass her with care" (XXIV,

250) in the drawing-room confrontation, or when she saw Charlotte "like some object marked . . . in blackness, saw her waver in the field of vision, saw her removed, transported, doomed" (XXIV, 271) when her father tells her they are going to America.

Along with her pity for Charlotte Maggie makes another discovery. Thinking of Charlotte she marvels at "the mystery by which a creature who could be in some connexions so earnestly right could be in others so perversely wrong" (XXIV, 289). A little later, the sound of Charlotte's voice like "the shriek of a soul in pain" fresh in her ears, she thinks, "There was honestly an awful mixture in things (XXIV, 292). Thus Maggie herself discovers the principle of ambiguity. These two thoughts of hers, along with the Prince's on staleness and freshness, innocence and guilt--reveal the core of the book. Any one of these three lines could be its epigraph. Critics do not pay much attention to Maggie's two thoughts; if these lines are quoted it is very seldom. Yet they are extremely significant, for they prove that not only is the author aware of the ambiguity in the book, but also that the main character herself perceives the ambiguity in at least one of its manifestations.

Maggie's "evil," then, consists primarily in her tendency to use and manipulate others. This was a fault when she remained innocent and ignorant, and as such helped the whole evil situation to exist. But because she was innocent and unconscious of her using of people, her attitudes and actions were forgivable.

But Maggie does not seem to learn from her mistake; rather, as her knowledge and sophistication increase, her manipulation increases. Critics, I believe, realize this, for it is virtually impossible to

ignore, but they rationalize it by saying she is simply using the only available methods to get her husband back. This is true to some extent, but Maggie rather overdoes the manipulating and seems, as well, to enjoy it. This, I hope, has been clear from my lengthy discussion of this aspect of her. Further, her selfishness in wanting to get her husband back is understandable, but her evident selfishness in wanting to hang on to her father until the very end is not. Her reluctance to grow herself and to let him grow, must be counted with her manipulation on the negative side.

Perhaps the most effective way to describe Maggie is by a term which she applies to herself: "mistress of shades" (XXIV, 142). The word "shades" is itself ambiguous and illustrates the many facets of her nature. In one sense, "shades" are minute differences, distinctions: in this sense, most Jamesian characters are masters or mistresses of shades, for they enjoy discriminating and distinguishing subtly. In another sense, "shades" are obscurities, darknesses, dimnesses of illumination; this relates not only to the darkness which Maggie has to learn to use, but also to the evil which she comes to see in others--and herself. A third connection with "shades" is twilight or dusk--that part of the day most ambiguous because neither dark nor light, but both--degrees of grey.¹¹ (It is significant that the colloquy and embrace on which the book ends take place in "the shadow of dusk" where the outside scene is described as a "great grey space" (XXIV, 366).) In all these ways, Maggie is a "mistress of shades."

¹¹ See Ward, The Imagination of Disaster, p. 38, on the ambiguity of dusk in James' early story "Madame de Mauves."

Adam

Adam Verver's goodness is not so much in evidence as Maggie's: we get it mainly in hearsay from the Prince, Mrs. Assingham, and especially Maggie. All three call him, from time to time, "great," or "magnificent." We also have some kind remarks on him from the omniscient narrator in the first pages of Book II (XXIII, 125 ff.). On the other hand, nearly everything we see of him first-hand turns out to be disagreeable in one way or another: his art collecting, his attitudes toward the Prince, Charlotte, and even Maggie. He does have the ambiguity of good mixed with evil, for certain of his motives and actions are wrong, while we are supposed to believe he is good even if we do not see it demonstrated. Yet ultimately this ambiguity is unsatisfactory, just because it is not fully seen. But Adam Verver remains ambiguous and the most enigmatic character in the book, for he possesses a second kind of ambiguity, not one in which two seemingly opposite qualities are combined in one person, but one in which the evidence never makes clear which of two opposite personalities the person is. The evidence is deliberate: it is balanced purposely so that we will not be able to make up our minds, so that we will never "know." That impossibility of knowing--about human character and about the future--is just the point James intends to make.

We learn very early that Mr. Verver "'thinks more'" of his collection of art objects and the museum he wishes to build in American City to house it, "'than of anything in the world. It's the work of his life and the motive of everything he does'" (XXIII, 12). Though the term "thinks more" itself has two meanings, they are pretty closely related for our purposes, and from the statement we can safely infer

that he cares more for rare objects than for people. Maggie says, with some humor intended, but also with a deeper truth which the reader perceives, "'We've been like a pair of pirates'" (XXIII, 13). The Prince feels that in Portland Place immediately preceding the wedding "Mr. Verver had pitched a tent suggesting that of Alexander furnished with the spoils of Darius" (XXIII, 19). Mr. Verver himself relates his life to "Keats's sonnet about stout Cortez in the presence of the Pacific; . . . it was probable that few persons had so devoutly fitted the poet's grand image to a fact of experience (XXIII, 141).¹² "His 'peak in Darien,'" he thinks, was the hour that he perceived "that a world was left him to conquer and that he might conquer it if he tried" (XXIII, 141). "To rifle the Golden Isles" became "the business of his future." He believes he has an affinity with "Genius, or at least . . . Taste" (XXIII, 141). He thinks of himself in these extraordinary terms: "He was equal somehow with the great seers, the invokers and encouragers of beauty--and he didn't after all perhaps dangle so far below the great producers and creators" (XXIII, 141). The images of plunder and acquisitiveness are unmistakable, as are Mr. Verver's overly grandiose conceptions of himself.

Verver's idealization of his collecting borders on the ridiculous.

It hadn't merely, his plan, all the sanctions of civilisation; it was positively civilisation condensed, concrete, consummate, set down by his hands as a house on a rock--a house from whose open doors and windows, open to grateful, to thirsty millions, the higher, the highest knowledge would shine out to bless the land, (XXIII, 145)

he thinks of his Museum. It will be "a monument to the religion he wished to propagate, the exemplary passion, the passion for perfection at any price" (XXIII, 146). It took critics some time to realize that

¹² The sonnet in question is Keats' "On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer."

James was not admiring all he described in Adam Verver; this interpretation is now generally accepted. There is too much irony in these passages on the man to believe that James took him entirely seriously.

Mr. Verver goes on to think about his late wife, dead many years, whom he loved very much but whom he now thinks would have prevented his love of art, for her taste was inferior and would have stultified his. His thoughts of her center in the question: "Would she have prevented him from ever scaling his vertiginous Peak?" (XXIII, 143). His silent answer is, Yes, and his relief at her demise is implied. A businessman who has become a millionaire solely from his business, his acquisitiveness in money is obviously--and perhaps not very flatteringly--linked to his art collecting. It is true that he has put aside business and its methods now, though he is aware of their relations to his present life: "The years of darkness had been needed to render possible the years of light," he thinks (XXIII, 144), and "He had wrought by devious ways, but he had reached the place, and what would ever have been straighter in any man's life than his way henceforth of occupying it?" (XXIII, 145). These last two thoughts are hard to interpret: they may be examples of the "businessman's morality," that the ends justify the means, indicating that Mr. Verver is still, at least in this, the businessman; or they may simply indicate that he has "reformed," so to speak, has seen the light and altered his values. We are never to know positively, for Adam remains inscrutable to the end. He is just as capable of "businessman's morality" as of an aesthetic morality, from what we know of him, and this, indeed, is James' point. The contrast of light and darkness in Verver's own thoughts gives visual expression to his seeming duality.

Again and again Mr. Verver thinks of the people around him in terms of art objects, and it is this apparent lack of humanity and cold

aestheticism which is one of his greatest faults. His comparison of persons with objects goes beyond the stage of handy imagery for a man in the art field. It is so profuse and so pointed that it indicates a definite state of mind: that people can be judged on the same terms and with the same flat finality as works of art.

Verver compares the Prince to "a great Palladian church" in a passage too famous to quote (XXIII, 135-36). He is relieved that the Prince "hadn't proved angular" (XXIII, 136), and again thinks in terms of architecture: "'You're round, my boy,'" he says to him,

'you're all, you're variously and inexhaustibly round, when you might, by all the chances, have been abominably square. . . . Say you had been formed all over in a lot of little pyramidal lozenges like that wonderful side of the Ducal Palace in Venice--so lovely in a building, but so damnable, for rubbing against, in a man.' (XXIII, 137-38)

Mr. Verver also compares the Prince to a crystal, "'a pure and perfect crystal'" (XXIII, 138), which has ironic overtones for the reader who knows the golden bowl is made of crystal and the crystal has a flaw which makes it susceptible to cracking. Mr. Verver admits to himself that

the instinct, the particular sharpened appetite of the collector, had fairly served as a basis for his acceptance of the Prince's suit. . . . The aspirant to his daughter's hand showed somehow the great marks and signs, stood before him with the high authenticities, he had learnt to look for in pieces of the first order. (XXIII, 140)

Amerigo also feels that he corresponds to a "cheque" of Mr. Verver's: that man's glance

made sure of the amount--and just so, from time to time, the amount of the Prince was certified. He was being thus, in renewed installments, perpetually paid in; he already reposed in the bank as a value, but subject, in this comfortable way, to repeated, to infinite endorsement. (XXIII, 325)

The Prince, then, appears to be just another item in Mr. Verver's

collection, good not for himself but for his "attributes," valued for such things as his "roundness"--i.e., the fact that he is easy to get along with--which the Prince feels are "standard equipment" for all his people.

Adam's own baby grandson is not free from comparisons with precious objects: "In the way of precious small pieces he had handled nothing so precious as the Principino . . . whom he could manipulate and dandle . . . as he couldn't a correspondingly rare morsel of an earlier pâte tendre" (XXIII, 147). Even his daughter he sees as some nymph of mythology, a statue on a pedestal or an image in relief on a vase (XXIII, 187-88).

But it is in connection with Charlotte that Mr. Verver's collector's consciousness really becomes active. "It served him at present to satisfy himself about Charlotte Stant and an extraordinary set of oriental tiles of which he had lately got wind" (XXIII, 197); nothing proves so much his identification of the lady with the tiles as the fact that he acquires (or at least announces his desire to acquire, in Charlotte's case) them the same afternoon. The narrator gives us, surprisingly, a clue: "Nothing perhaps might affect us as queerer, had we time to look into it, than this application of the same measure of value to such different pieces of property as old Persian carpets, say, and new human acquisitions" (XXIII, 196). This collecting, both of people and objects, "was all at bottom in him, the aesthetic principle, planted where it could burn with a cold still flame" (XXIII, 197). The aesthetic principle: it is this cold passion rather than any warm human principle which guides Mr. Verver.

Yet even here there is an ambiguity: "cold, still flame" suggest two opposite qualities, coldness and stillness, and the warmth and

movement of flame. James does this again and again throughout the book: shows us an image in which opposite qualities are combined. It is part of his method of ambiguity. It is there in the "midnight sun" which Mr. Verver imagines a little later (XXIII, 207). It is in the white curtain Amerigo likens to his companions: white generally connoting, like light, a revelation or illumination; the curtain concealing. This same tendency comes to Maggie: "her weakness, her desire, . . . flowered in her face like a light or a darkness" (XXIV, 352). It is in the term "blameless egoism" (XXIV, 145) which is applied to Maggie's manipulations. (It is interesting that most of these images are related to light.) Thus even when James wants us to have a certain reaction to Mr. Verver, he is also reminding us of his ambiguity.

James gives us a definite statement of Adam's ambiguity in one sense as he describes his eyes: "There was something in Adam Verver's eyes that both admitted the morning and the evening in unusual quantities. . . . They were . . . youthfully, almost strangely beautiful, with their ambiguity of your scarce knowing if they most carried their possessor's vision out or most opened themselves to your own" (XXIII, 170).¹³ It is also interesting that the omniscient narrator, praising Verver, explains he is weary of "the many-coloured human appeal" and longs for a vision instead of "impersonal whiteness" (XXIII, 126). One wonders really what this means, especially in light of Amerigo's "white curtain."

¹³ James uses the words "ambiguity" or "ambiguous" several times in the book. Usually it has a limited meaning, being restricted to one character's sense of two or more meanings in something said by another.

This very question just raised--Verver's motivation in marrying Charlotte--is, along with the question of whether he knows of the illicit affair or not, the core of his ambiguity. We are never certain whether he married Charlotte for Maggie or for himself, just as we never know whether he knows what Maggie comes to know. In the end it becomes clear James has come into the realms of epistemology: he is telling us that we cannot know. Adam Verver's ambiguity is a kind of demonstration of Colonel Assingham's exclamation, "'We know nothing on earth--'" (XXIII, 400), which has been called by Bayley the most significant line in the book and the statement of the theme.¹⁴

As Adam contemplates whether to ask Charlotte to marry him, it seems clear he ultimately decides to do so just for the very reason of helping Maggie (XXIII, 207-08). This also seems clear as he actually proposes to Charlotte, and it is certainly what Charlotte herself sees (XXIII, 222-23). Much later in the London park scene with Maggie he seems to try to deny that he married Charlotte for Maggie's sake (XXIV, 93), a position which seems odd considering the previous evidence. Of course, if he really knows of the affair and is trying to help Maggie (something which will always remain a question, for we never know whether he does or not), he could be trying to deny Maggie's responsibility in order to divert her from thinking the whole thing is her fault. Even a few pages from the end of the book, Adam says to Maggie regarding his marrying Charlotte: "'You see . . . how right I was. Right, I mean, to do it for you'" (XXIV, 364). Even here it is possible to believe that Adam is simply trying to help Maggie: knowing they will

¹⁴ Bayley, pp. 240, 261-62.

separate soon, he at least gives her some happiness by allowing her to keep one illusion. Otherwise it seems repulsive he should be saying this now, when Charlotte is suffering so much. Surely, we think, she should be loved for herself now, when she has been a tool for Maggie's ease for so long. It is horrible to think Adam Verver is still being selfish here. But the entire question remains unsolved, and so contributes to the ambiguity.

As for his actual marriage to Charlotte, Adam Verver seems happy enough, though of course it is the same kind of happiness as Maggie's: selfish, unthinking, heedless of the needs of others. There is, however, one aspect of their marriage which is unsatisfactory, to Charlotte, at least: Mr. Verver is evidently at present impotent or sterile or both (XXIII, 307). It is interesting that James would have chosen to make this man, so powerful, we are told, in the outside world, unable to father a child and perhaps unable to satisfy his wife. His present impotence can be taken as a symbol for a spiritual or emotional poverty. His refusal to tell Charlotte before their marriage, if he knew, causes him to appear diabolical.

Adam describes well his own complacent selfishness about his marriage and the life he is leading. Again his motives in marrying Charlotte seem very questionable. His depiction to Maggie of their extreme happiness ironically comes after Maggie's enlightenment, but his words can be applied to the father's and daughter's original attitudes and emotions:

'There seems a kind of charm, doesn't there? on our life-- and quite as if just lately it had got itself somehow renewed, had waked up refreshed. A kind of wicked selfish prosperity perhaps, as if we had grabbed everything, fixed everything, down to the last lovely object for the last glass case of the last corner, left over, of my old show. That's the only take-off, that it has made us perhaps lazy,

a wee bit languid--lying like gods together, all careless of mankind.' (XXIV, 90-91)

"We get nothing but the fun," he goes on, and "'We haven't . . . enough the sense of difficulty . . . enough not to be selfish'" (XXIV, 91). He continues,

'There's something haunting--as if it were a bit uncanny--in such a consciousness of our general comfort and privilege. . . .It's "sort of" soothing; as if we were sitting about on divans, with pigtails, smoking opium and seeing visions. "Let us then be up and doing"--what is it Longfellow says? That seems sometimes to ring out; like the police breaking in--into our opium-den--to give us a shake. But the beauty of it is at the same time that we are doing; we're doing, that is, after all, what we went in for.' (XXIV, 92)

What they went in for turns out to be, in part, "'to have made Charlotte so happy--to have so perfectly contented her,'" and "'by our having put Charlotte so at her ease'" (XXIV, 92-93). "'Don't you see what a crop-per [severe fall; failure or collapse] we would have come if she hadn't settled down as she has?'" Adam asks (XXIV, 93). The entire conversation is so full of irony for Maggie and the reader that she and we can hardly bear it.¹⁵ The disagreeable side to Maggie's and Adam's apparent unselfishness and good will is very clear here. The fact that at this point Maggie is no longer selfish in the same way Mr. Verver speaks of, and has experienced quite a bit besides "the fun," does not cancel what James is revealing about her recent past. The pair then go on to discuss their using of Charlotte: "'Whenever one corners Charlotte,'" Mr. Verver says, "'one finds that she only wants to know what we want. Which is what we got her for!'" "'What we got her for--exactly!'" Maggie is forced to reply. Mr. Verver continues, "'Her idea, I think,

¹⁵ There is even a kind of double irony in the fact that, as Leyburn notes, p. 167, Adam Verver describes "the fun" in terms almost as sinister as Maggie is actually experiencing it.

this time, is that we shall have more people, more than we've hitherto had, in the country. Don't you remember that that, originally, was what we were to get her for?' 'Oh yes--to give us a life,'" Maggie replies (XXIV, 94-95). Charlotte, thus, was originally considered a convenience by them; she is thought of in approximately the same way as Mr. Verver's art collections are considered--as a thing, with a function, aesthetic or practical, to be put to use.

The ambiguity of this entire conversation is great. If Mr. Verver really perceives the selfishness and the unpleasant side of his way of life, he could hardly speak about it the way he does--tossing it off, more or less, like idle chit-chat. The lightness of his tone jars unpleasantly with the meaning of the words. On the other hand, if he does not realize his guilt and wrongness, it is very hard to understand how he could say such things. He would have to be unconscious of what he was saying, but in view of these lengthy, explicit speeches, it is difficult to believe that he is so. We must accept that we cannot know which interpretation is correct.

Our first important "not-knowing" about Adam, then, is his motivation in marrying Charlotte. The second is whether he is aware or not of the affair and Maggie's consequent actions. From the beginning of Volume XXIV we are faced with the question of how much Adam knows about the actions of the other characters. For example, he makes a dramatic announcement to Maggie--dramatic, that is, to Charlotte and the Prince--that he has decided he and his daughter will not take a holiday to Spain as they were considering. Thus, of course, the Prince and Charlotte will not be left alone together. The "effect" on these two of the announcement is "prodigious" (XXIV, 53). Her father seems actually to be helping

Maggie, not by the words alone but also by his timing and the particular manner in which he does it. It is hard to believe he is not "up to something." Similarly, in the London park scene, he seems very definitely, to Maggie's perception, to be helping her (XXIV, 88-90), yet nowhere is there positive proof that he is doing so or even that he knows. Adam seems both to know and not to know: this is part of his ambiguity.

Adam's ambiguity in this sense is marvelously summed up and illuminated in a conversation between Fanny Assingham and her husband. Fanny calls Mr. Verver "'too inconceivably funny'": "'That is he may be, for all I know, too inconceivably great. . . .You see he may be stupid too. . . .Yet on the other hand . . . he may be sublime: sublimer even than Maggie herself. . . .But we shall never know'" (XXIV, 135). As Mrs. Leyburn shows, "funny" is a word which in this book has shifting meanings.¹⁶ Here it seems virtually synonymous with "ambiguous." Mr. Verver may be either stupid or sublime--but we never know.

In the second park scene at Fawns, Adam again seems to be aware of hidden elements in the relationships among the characters. Maggie, at least, is absolutely certain that her father is trying to communicate his knowledge to her (XXIV, 267-69, 285). When Maggie proclaims she is "sacrificing" her father and he asks her, "'But to what in the world?'" she fears that the "equilibrium" will be lost, that she will reply, "To Amerigo" and thus reveal all (XXIV, 267-68). Yet she does not make this reply, for she perceives "the warning of his eyes"; Adam helps her to keep her head--or so she imagines (XXIV, 268). But he again saves her by mentioning at this point that he is thinking of

¹⁶ Leyburn has a whole chapter, VII, "The Use of the Word 'Funny' in the Late Novels" which is interesting.

taking his wife to America. It seems impossible that he might have thought of this perfect solution independently, not knowing Maggie was in trouble, yet in James nothing is impossible. The possibility of this coincidence remains open, and remains so to the very end. Maggie feels, on the other hand, near the end, in spite of her previous certainty that her father does indeed know, that nobody knows how much he knows (XXIV, 335). She is very firm about it. And so we are more uncertain than ever, but this is the intention.

Yet perhaps this uncertainty is more in James' mind than in Maggie's, for the latter does feel certain her father knows something. She feels he is punishing Charlotte for what she has done. He is "weaving his spell" (XXIV, 284), meditatively pacing in and out of view, while Charlotte's uneasy eyes remain on him (XXIV, 284, 286, 287-88, 290, 301). This image has been compared by at least one critic¹⁷ to a spider weaving its web, and holding the fly as trapped, fascinated by its gaze. Maggie also imagines her father is leading Charlotte by a silken rope, in the striking quotation we gave on page 53 in the discussion of Charlotte. Maggie imagines that her father occasionally gives her, Maggie, "a wordless, wordless smile, but the smile was the soft shake of the twisted silken rope," which Maggie translates into the following ghastly message from her father:

'Yes, you see--I lead her now by the neck, I lead her to her doom, and she doesn't so much as know what it is, though she has a fear in her heart which . . . you would hear thump and thump and thump. She thinks it may be, her doom, the awful place over there--awful for her; but she's afraid to ask, don't you see? just as she's

¹⁷ Firebaugh, p. 407.

afraid of not asking; just as she's afraid of so many other things that she sees multiplied all about her now as perils and portents. She'll know, however-- when she does know.' (XXIV, 287-88)

An image and a message crueler it would be hard to find, and Maggie thinks of it more than once (XXIV, 331, 358). However, we must be careful, for we have no absolute proof that Adam is really doing these things: all are from Maggie's point of view. If he is, they must be chalked with the things on his "evil" side, for no matter how deserved by Charlotte, still they are cruel. The fact that he feels pity for her and is overcome by tears when he hears her "shriek of a soul in pain" (XXIV, 292) is not enough, for it does not cause him to abate his torture.

If these images do not reflect the activities of Adam Verver, but are merely projections by Maggie, we must ask what they indicate about her. Are they proof of her own sadism and cruelty, as Firebaugh believes?¹⁸ If so, they must be linked with Maggie's numerous perceptions of Charlotte as an animal in a cage (Maggie frantically wonders for a second if there isn't some way Charlotte can be "hemmed in and secured" XXIV, 239 and "at bay" XXIV, 303). (See my text on Charlotte for a full discussion of this.) Or are they indications of her incipient pity, as Wright feels?¹⁹ They can also be seen partly, in any case, as objective evidence of Charlotte's anguish.²⁰ Again, we do not know and will never know.

¹⁸ Firebaugh, p. 407.

¹⁹ Wright, "Maggie Verver: Neither Saint Nor Witch," p. 65.

²⁰ Wright, p. 65.

There is one beautiful small vignette not far from the end of the book which perfectly illustrates Adam Verver's ambiguity and our "not-knowing." Maggie, ready to search for Charlotte in the noonday heat, goes first to check on her sleeping son. She finds her father keeping watch by the crib: "Her father sat there with as little motion--with head thrown back and supported, with eyes apparently closed, with the fine foot that was so apt to betray nervousness at peace upon the other knee" (XXIV, 305). She hesitates;

She looked over her fan, the top of which was pressed against her face, long enough to wonder if her father really slept or if, aware of her, he only kept consciously quiet. Did his eyes truly fix her between lids partly open, and was she to take this--his forbearance from any question--only as a sign again that everything was left to her? (XXIV, 306)

Such is Adam Verver, inscrutable to the last.

Our not-knowing about Adam Verver is related to our not-knowing whether Charlotte and the Prince have actually committed adultery. The implication is that they indeed have, but we have no positive proof. Bayley, in his interesting study, believes that James is reproducing life: whether by chance, by our limited vision, or by the protection of conventions ("manners"), life is incalculable and we are never certain of "knowing." He believes James did not even want to know whether the affair was a literal fact.²¹

A careful reading of the book will reveal an unusually high use of the word "know." In one short conversation alone, the word comes up thirteen times (XXIV, 334-35). Charlotte is "left in the limbo of a kind of

²¹ Bayley, p. 240.

absolute not-knowing"²² at the end: this is one of the worst aspects of her punishment and Maggie very close to the end refuses to allow the Prince to tell Charlotte he lied to her, which would at least reduce the anguish of her not-knowing. Evidence from the book certainly, then, supports "not-knowing" as a theme. Tony Tanner sums up this aspect very perceptively: "James . . . has demonstrated the impossibility of any clear, confident appraisal of the world--an impossibility inherent in the fluid mutational character of the world and the necessary limits of vision."²³ Though Tanner is actually discussing What Maisie Knew here, his comment applies perfectly to The Golden Bowl.

²² Bayley, p. 222.

²³ Tony Tanner, The Reign of Wonder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 288.

CHAPTER IV

IMPLICATIONS OF THE ENDING

James' reluctance to have "happy endings" to most of his novels and stories has led critics like F. O. Matthiessen to believe he placed high value on renunciation and loss.¹ Miss Sears believes his imagination was "negative" because he "could not assert positive values with . . . conviction."² Austin Warren realizes that "the danger of such a philosophy is that, in its awareness, its inclusiveness, it shall turn finally sceptical, or regard ambiguity and complexity as final virtues," though he believes that this did not happen to James, that "he was emphatically not a sceptic nor a believer in mutual cancellations."³ Mrs. Lebowitz, among others, reads The Golden Bowl as the final victory in James, the triumph in which the heroine does not renounce, as Christopher Newman, Isabel Archer, Milly Theale, and Lambert Strether have done, but wins everything.⁴ Other critics, such as R. P. Blackmur, see too much that is disturbing in the book to take quite this view,⁵ and

¹ Matthiessen, Henry James: The Major Phase, p. 51.

² Sears, p. xii.

³ Austin Warren, "Myth and Dialectic in the Later Novels of Henry James," in The Kenyon Critics, ed. John Crowe Ransom (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1951), p. 57.

⁴ Lebowitz, pp. 130-42.

⁵ R. P. Blackmur, "Introduction" to The Golden Bowl (New York: Dell, 1963), pp. 5-13.

it is with this point of view that I agree.

The ending of The Golden Bowl, as of any book, is important, for it is surely from it that the ultimate meaning of the work derives. It, too, can and has been read in more than one way. Some critics, as we pointed out in Chapter I, see the ending as Maggie's triumph, but there is too much that has gone before as well as a great deal in the scene itself, that prevents us from accepting this interpretation wholly.

On the one hand, explicitly, Maggie has her prize, the Prince, at last: "His presence alone, as he paused to look at her, somehow made it the highest, and even before he had spoken she had begun to be paid in full" (XXIV, 368). She thinks of "the assurance of her safety" (XXIV, 368). The Prince's final words, "'See'? I see nothing but you'" (XXIV, 369) are taken to mean he is hers at last, and this is demonstrated by the embrace on which the book end.

Yet the darker, implicit aspect of these last two pages is what strikes some readers more immediately. Maggie's "terror" is spoken of twice in the last paragraphs, and her "horror" once (XXIV, 367-68). Her husband's eyes, when he says, "'See'? I see nothing but you,'" are "so strangely lighted" that, "as for pity and dread of them she buried her own in his breast" (XXIV, 369). Pity and dread, pity and terror--these are Aristotle's words, his description of the emotions inspired by tragedy, and their recurrence so often in this last "triumphant" scene cannot but suggest the tragedy present in the closing situation. As Francis Fergusson puts it, "the authentic tragic emotion . . . is here, in the instant of vision

and fulfillment itself."⁶ Further, as we noted in our discussion of the Prince, his desire to "confess" at clearly the wrong moment to Maggie and his obvious lack of understanding in what she is telling him about Charlotte, make us uneasy. The imagery of Maggie's thoughts is also suspect. She has just been examining the Prince and Charlotte in terms of "objects" with her father, and her thoughts on the last pages compare her regaining of the Prince with money images. The word "paid" or "payment" occurs four times in two paragraphs (XXIV, 367-68), along with a great deal of other money and gambling imagery; this only reinforces our feeling that she is still thinking of the Prince in terms of material wealth. Also, the mention of "the shadow of dusk," "twilight," and "the great grey space" outside (XXIV, 366-67), further supports my point that it is both implicit and explicit meanings which are true, not one or the other (see my text p. 98).

Aside from this specific scene, there is much elsewhere in the book to prevent us from believing in the ending as a complete triumph. The Prince's statement that everything is terrible in the heart of man, comes too near the end, for one thing. Also there is the haunting question that Maggie asks herself when she realizes she and her father will probably have to part:

⁶ Francis Fergusson, "The Golden Bowl Revisited," *Sewanee Review*, 63 (Winter 1955), 27. Miss Krook sees two alternative ways of interpreting Maggie's pity and dread: 1) the "pity" is for his suffering and the "dread" for the possibility he may confess, p. 318; and 2) the "pity" is for his subjugation to her tyranny and the "dread" at her own actions, at his realization of his subjection, or both, pp. 323-24. However, I do not feel the need to make each line yield two opposite meanings, as Miss Krook does; to me the combination of "tragedy" in the pity and dread, and "victory" in the marital embrace expresses the ambiguity adequately.

Say they accepted this account of their situation as a practical finality, acting upon it and proceeding to a division, would no sombre ghosts of the smothered past on either side show across the widening strait pale unappeased faced, or raise in the very passage deprecating denouncing hands?" (XXIV, 74).

Also, it is nowhere stated or implied that the Prince actually has come to love Maggie; he "needs" her, she "mystifies" him, he is clearly fascinated by her. Some critics see that it is this fascination at her manipulation and power-politics that causes the Prince to come back to her, not real love. Others see that he has been more or less forced back into the fold, unable to do anything to oppose the new strength Maggie displays. Further, there is no clear evidence that the Prince has learned what he was supposed to. His statement about the terrible-ness in the heart of man is sometimes taken as proof that he has learned, but it could just as easily be the statement of a morally unenlightened, but sophisticated, man, the man of the first part of the book, as the realization of a man who has learned a truth and come to see the distinction between good and evil. Maggie, on the other hand, clearly thinks and speaks of her love and desire for the Prince, but we cannot be sure that it is not the same immature, "use"-oriented affection that she began with.

Some critics find the ending basically optimistic, including some of those who were otherwise perceptive on James' ambiguity. Walter Wright, one of these, sees the perils which may lie ahead for Maggie and Amerigo, and the lack of a guarantee that they will live "happily ever after," but feels that they are finally able to love each other with completeness and acceptance and without reservation, and therefore that they have reason for hope.⁷ However, we really do not have the evidence

⁷ Wright, "Maggie Verver: Neither Saint Nor Witch," p. 71.

of this complete and all-accepting love on the part of either Maggie or Amerigo. Amerigo's case we have outlined in the previous paragraph; Maggie does seem to come to an understanding at the end that the Prince really was acting in "good faith" (XXIV, 350), but the "surrender" she experiences several times close to the end (XXIV, 339-40, 341-42, 352-53) could just as plausibly be due to sexual attraction as to real love. In a later study, however, Wright fascinatingly does not emphasize his previous position but says, "The very end has exciting ambiguities."⁸

James L. Spencer's interpretation is also centrally concerned with the question of what Maggie and Amerigo ultimately accept. Amerigo comes to love Maggie--or at least is fascinated by what to him is unknown in her; "in her new depth she has become rather inscrutable, and for him a fascinating person."⁹ Maggie, on the other hand, realizes he cannot become the moral man she had hoped, but she accepts his love or fascination as a substitute. The irony is, according to Spencer, that Maggie has come to accept the moral flaw in their lives, but as the Prince never realized his flaw, he does not even know this. It would seem Spencer sees the ending as more-or-less positive, but his realization that Maggie has compromised after modifying her original belief in the possibility of perfection in her marriage leads him to ask, "By raising questions at the very end of the novel concerning Maggie's 'success,' James raises questions concerning her 'rightness,' too."¹⁰ Actually, it is critics like Crews¹¹ who believe that Maggie's ability to

⁸ Wright, The Madness of Art, p. 249.

⁹ Spencer, p. 343.

¹⁰ Spencer, p. 344.

¹¹ Crews, pp. 111-12.

compromise is what saves her. The question must be whether she correctly modifies views which were rigid and immature, or whether she capitulates out of desire for the Prince and because it is the only thing to do after all her manipulations.

Christof Wegelin, whose rather strange views on the relationship between Maggie and the Prince we mentioned earlier (see p.18 of my text), believes that we see "the gradual convergence of their [Maggie's and the Prince's] originally divergent points of view, a process which is externalized by the transformation of their marriage,"¹² which results in "the gradual coalescence of Maggie's and the Prince's moral consciousness" at the end.¹³ Wegelin believes, as we have noted before, that James intended America and Europe finally to unite in this book. But the fact remains that, since we see only from Maggie's point of view in the last half of the novel, it is virtually impossible to know whether the Prince's point of view has joined hers, or whether he has indeed achieved moral consciousness.

Frederick Crews perceptively recognizes the "careful ambiguities of ultimate meaning"¹⁴ of the book, but feels, in spite of this, that Maggie finally demonstrates love and care for human relationships. He feels that she comes to see that "to destroy evil one must also destroy good, since the two are inseparably joined in the human beings at hand. She has come to love people for what they are, good and bad qualities together, rather than for what they should ideally be. She has learned

¹² Wegelin, p. 124.

¹³ Wegelin, p. 129.

¹⁴ Crews, p. 81.

to accomodate evil. In other words, she has learned to live."¹⁵ This sounds very nice, but still does not explain the ending. Since she has obviously not destroyed the Prince at the end, the question is, has she destroyed the evil in him? Has he remained unchanged throughout the novel and does she accept him this way at the end? Is her only victory, then, simply getting rid of Charlotte? Actually I think Crews is confused, for I believe he means that Maggie has simply come to realize evil and understand that it exists. Certainly the book does not suggest that she actually compromises to the point of accepting the Prince full of evil, though this is what Crews is actually saying. For though the Prince is full of faults at the end, it would be hard to say he is positively evil. The only thing we are really certain of is that the potentiality of evil still exists in him. I think it is much more we than Maggie who realize by the end that it is not an ideal world and that good and evil are inextricably mixed. Crews comes a lot closer to the truth when he says that "James's consciousness of evil is as strong as ever at the end";¹⁶ it is this generalized evil more than evil represented in one person which comes across to the reader by the end of the book.

I agree with Crews' statement (quoted on p. 30) that The Golden Bowl ends on the "authentic dissonance" with which it began.¹⁷ Crews feels that the union of America and Europe which Wegelin speaks of is "unmistakably present," but that it "seems to be offered with a certain

¹⁵ Crews, p. 105.

¹⁶ Crews, p. 8.

¹⁷ Crews, p. 114.

moral reserve on the author's part,"¹⁸ as seen in the fact that Charlotte is left out in the end, and in what Maggie has done to Amerigo. This reserve is due to James' own unfailing sense of evil and his realization of the "moral errors" of this world.¹⁹

Dorothea Krook is a fascinating example of a critic who has changed her entire interpretation; at first the ending to her was entirely positive, later she saw the mixture of tragedy and triumph in it. In an article published in 1954, eight years before the publication of her book, she sees absolutely nothing of the ambiguity, but only Maggie as the savior. Naturally she feels the ending is triumphant: "The rose bursts, all losses are restored, and all anguish and terror and despair vanquished by the transforming power of love."²⁰ However, as in her book she has come to perceive the ambiguity, she realizes that the ending cannot be read solely in these terms: "The 'pessimism' is there, in the unforgettable knowledge of the price that has had to be paid--Maggie's suffering, Charlotte's, the Prince's; the 'optimism' is there, in the faith that the good can nevertheless be affirmed so long as there are people willing to pay in suffering."²¹ Though Miss Krook here perceives the ambiguity, she is unwilling to give up her view that the redemptive theme is partially correct, still feeling, as in the article, that the Prince has been transformed from an aesthetic into a moral man, and that he now possesses the knowledge of good and evil.²² Even in

¹⁸ Crews, p. 110.

¹⁹ Crews, p. 114.

²⁰ Krook, "The Golden Bowl," p. 734.

²¹ Krook, The Ordeal, p. 322.

²² Krook, "The Golden Bowl," p. 725; The Ordeal, p. 262.

her lengthy treatment of the Prince in her book, however, she does not give us convincing evidence of the Prince's sudden acquisition of morality or the knowledge of good and evil, nor does she attempt to explain how Maggie could be a savior using the transforming power of love, at the same time that she is a manipulator and power-seeker (see my text pp. 9-10 for Krook's own confusion of thought in this connection).

J. A. Ward correctly notes that "it is a facile judgment to assume the lesson is entirely an ethical one, demonstrating the triumph of the married state over the adulterous one, or of goodness over evil."²³ He believes Maggie wins the Prince because of her methods, not her objective, and because she defeats Charlotte with Charlotte's own means; "her love is manifested in her force of will and her ruthlessness; it depends upon the intellectual qualities of self-awareness and insight into the motives of others."²⁴ If this is true, and it seems as plausible as any interpretation, it seems unlikely either that the Prince has been turned into a moral man or that he loves her for her real qualities but rather for her greater adeptness in those very qualities he loved Charlotte for.

Joseph J. Firebaugh believes that Amerigo "admires" Maggie's "machinations in support of self-interest," for she comes to possess the very qualities he admires and understands: Power, ownership, and abso-
lution. He feels that "truly, the two are well-matched" at the end.²⁵ Though he finds Maggie and Adam the villains, he does not feel James'

²³ Ward, The Search for Form, p. 209.

²⁴ Ward, p. 210.

²⁵ Firebaugh, p. 409.

values were perverted in this book, for he finds James' case against the absolutism and totalitarianism of the father and daughter damning and believes this is exactly what the author intended.²⁶

Miss Sears notes the lack of triumph in the ending, and feels that nothing "'beautiful' or 'exquisite' has happened to America. . . . Rather, he becomes 'a proud man reduced to abjection' . . . and 'mystified, confounded, tormented.'"²⁷ She points out that "there is no indication that Amerigo has come to love her [Maggie] better than he did in the beginning, or indeed at all. What he does admit is that he underestimated her."²⁸ She finds the ultimate vision of the novel "ravage and woe and brutality,"²⁹ and believes that it actually "challenges the ethical basis of human life."³⁰ But, as we have already seen, she holds the extreme and, I think, incorrect, belief that good and evil have become interchangeable for James in this book.

Caroline G. Mercer agrees with Crews that Maggie realizes the impossibility of perfection in life and marriage, and sees that a flawed life still can be lived.³¹ But we have no real evidence that Maggie does not still want the golden bowl as it originally was--without a flaw; unless we take as evidence that she accepts the flawed Prince at the end, but we do not know how flawed he really is at the end. We have

²⁶ Firebaugh, p. 410.

²⁷ Sears, p. 193.

²⁸ Sears, p. 193.

²⁹ Sears, p. 163.

³⁰ Sears, pp. 164-65.

³¹ Mercer, p. 266.

a pretty clear idea of what was the matter with him earlier in the book--
i.e., he lacks a moral sense and hence carries on an affair with his
 wife's best friend-- but do not know to what extent his lack has been
 made up for. I do agree, however, with Miss Mercer's evaluation of
 Maggie at the end: "she cannot be totally freed [from her guilt for
 causing Charlotte to suffer]Nor will she in her own marriage be
 free of pain: she faces it with so much dread and pity in her passion
 that she must seem to us in some degree a tragic figure."³² This well
 expresses the mixture of triumph and tragedy which Maggie experiences
 at the end. Still, her motivation in her surrender to the Prince is not
 cleared up.

Some critics have serious doubts as to whether Maggie's faults, her
 "evils," have undergone any transformation at all, and contemplate her
 future full of the same horrors as are in the book. Edwin T. Bowden,
 for one, believes that "Maggie's form of protected innocence . . . may
 continue on beyond its first great trial."³³ Although I think it is
 pretty clear she is no longer the innocent child she was at the be-
 ginning, other of her faults, as we have previously stated, seem to be
 as much with her now as then. Miriam Allott, speaking of Maggie and
 Adam, considers it "a moot point whether, for all their virtue, they
 will ever be less dangerous or more commendable than the others. In the
 last analysis their 'power of purchase' and their great possessions are
 revealed as the agents of a general corruption."³⁴

³² Mercer, p. 267.

³³ Bowden, p. 113.

³⁴ Miriam Allott, "Symbol and Image in the Later Work of Henry
 James," Essays in Criticism, 3 (July 1953), 335-36.

But actually it is not relevant to speculate on what will happen to the characters after the end of the novel. Such questions are only theoretical and do not solve anything. They avoid the real issue. For if James had wanted to write more, he would have: he does not want us to envision the future of Maggie and the others; he is telling us about them now. Their reality lies only in the meaning invested by their creator, and the ending of the novel is part of that meaning. The ending of The Golden Bowl is not only full of the ambiguity we have seen throughout the book, the triumph and the failure, the victory and the tragedy, the confidence and the uncertainty, but also the larger message seems to be that we cannot know, at any given moment, how things will be in the future.³⁵ The possibility for success or failure--those opposite terms which are repeated so often in the book (XXIV, 248, 273-74, 334, 361, 366)--exists in every moment. To try to decide how Maggie and the Prince will turn out--or Adam and Charlotte--is to defeat this purpose.

Rather we must try to come to grips with the meaning as it exists at the end of the book. We do not know--nor is it relevant to think about--what will happen to any of the characters. What we do know is that all four major characters (As well as Mrs. Assingham) have been guilty, and that the guilt has been tied up with their good qualities, or "consideration." As Mrs. Assingham puts it: "'It's their mutual

³⁵ Gard, p. 107, says that it is "unacceptable" for a work of art to posit this, for in life "there is always (or nearly always) a future in which our hypotheses about people can be confirmed or denied." I challenge this but can bring no really academic proof to the case. Mr. Gard has evidently lived a different life from mine.

consideration, all round, that has made it the bottomless gulf; and they're really so embroiled but because, in their way, they've been so improbably good"" (XXIII, 394). We know that Maggie and Adam definitely seem still to possess some of their serious faults. We know that we do not know to what extent the Prince has "reformed." We know that we do not know what motivates Adam Verver or how much he knows. Therefore at the end our two kinds of ambiguity seem to be all we are certain of. Two characters still possess the mixture of right and wrong, good and evil. The other two, the implication is, possess the potentiality for this mixture. That is type one. As for type two, we do not know what the Prince is, we do not know about Adam, and we do not really know, either, much about Charlotte.

None of the interpretations I have discussed can be completely right, because all these critics are trying to tie the ending up in some kind of reconciliation of what they see as the loose ends. The few critics who do not do this believe that the end does not solve any of the reader's problems and that James did not know what he was doing. But if we assume that James did know what he was doing and left the situation at the end of the book as he wished it, we are left simply with the thoroughly plausible but much-overlooked (in this case) principle of the open ending.

There are two senses of the term "open" which apply to the ending of The Golden Bowl, as well as to other of James' works. It is "open" in the sense Alan Friedman uses it: the stream of conscience, or the moral flow of fiction (not merely of a character), evolves outward to a moral widening, instead of being contained by a restricting ending. In most eighteenth and nineteenth century English novels, the writer

"attests chiefly and eloquently to the difficult necessity, the coherence and the dignity, of achieving a closed ethical experience in the course of life,"³⁶ for instance, the marriage and settling down of Tom Jones after a wild and hardly moral life; while "modern fiction attests chiefly and as eloquently to the reverse: an open experience,"³⁷ for instance, Molly Bloom's "conclusion" (the very word is an irony here) to Ulysses, "her infinitely expanding and all-embracing Yes."³⁸

Robert M. Adams uses the term "open" in a less restricted, and probably more well-known sense: new ground is broken, morally, in experience; in the new experience we find "a major unresolved conflict with the intent of displaying its unresolvedness."³⁹ In Adams' sense of the word, the novelist does not close up the novel at the end: everything is not "solved" and tied up, we do not see a readily available "moral" to the work. This is not to say that an "open" novel is not ethical; indeed, it may be displaying its ethics simply by not coming to a final conclusion.

Mrs. Lebowitz is the only critic I have found who has applied this term to James;⁴⁰ she recognizes that "in his greatest works, James . . . does leave open ends."⁴¹ I believe that she combines both Friedman's

³⁶ Friedman, p. xv.

³⁷ Friedman, p. xv.

³⁸ Friedman, p. 31.

³⁹ Robert M. Adams, Strains of Discord (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958), p. 13.

⁴⁰ Bayley seems to sense it, p. 210, but then seems to me to contradict himself, pp. 258-59.

⁴¹ Lebowitz, p. 94.

meaning of an open ethical experience and Adams' of non-resolution-- which, after all, are related to each other--in her own comments on the open endings of Lawrence's The Rainbow and James' The Golden Bowl: "While James's single growing center of consciousness in the second part of The Golden Bowl seems to culminate in a closed ending, his 'fairy tale' conclusion [i.e., with the implication of living "happily ever after"] is only a very tenuous and temporary closing of the circle. Both The Rainbow and The Golden Bowl suggest the complexity, not the complacency, of a marital future."⁴²

I think there is no question that James' conclusion to The Golden Bowl is "open" in both senses. We perceive Robert Adams' conception of openness in James' depiction of the unresolved reality of contemporary experience. Living in an age when God was of little help to man and all values were being shaken, James faced the void and came to the realization that we cannot know how everything will turn out, in single experiences or in our total life. The Golden Bowl is also "open" in Alan Friedman's sense, in that James does not restrict the characters at the end, which is in keeping with the freedom he allows them throughout the rest of the book.⁴³ Instead of a vision of Maggie and the Prince "living happily ever after," which would be the prepared-for and restricting finale, we perceive they must do infinitely more growing and struggling, the end result of which we realize we as readers cannot know.

⁴² Lebowitz, pp. 55-56.

⁴³ At first glance the ending of The Golden Bowl does seem restrictive, as do those of The Portrait of a Lady, The Ambassadors, and The Wings of the Dove. But none of these endings are truly restrictive if the larger meanings of each book are understood.

We have no idea whether they will be happy or not, or what they would specifically have to do to be happy: hence, the "open" conclusion.

Ambiguity and the open end, however, are not in most cases synonymous. Certainly neither Ulysses as a whole nor Molly Bloom's monologue is likely to be called "ambiguous," though they do show the ambiguous nature of life. The problem is that this very non-resolution is in James so complex that it is designated by critics as his ambiguity. His non-resolution happens to be more complex than that of Ulysses or of most other works. This is the more obvious link between ambiguity and the open end. The deeper, logical, internal link does not make ambiguity and open-endedness synonymous or equivalent in this novel, but makes the open ending the inevitable result of both types of ambiguity. The intermixture of opposite qualities, together with our not-knowing, produce the open end.

In the final analysis, the only way to extract the meaning of this book is to accept the premises on which it is based, that life is multiple, meaning hidden, and the outcome uncertain. A second reading of The Golden Bowl is infinitely easier than the first, particularly if one has attempted to remain open to the radical, modern, ways of looking at life which it presents.⁴⁴ Ambiguity serves in three capacities in this book: first, as the theme, or meaning; second, as James' method of presenting that meaning; and third, the most important of all, as the expansion of life-pattern and of consciousness which the book offers to

⁴⁴ Sears, p. 161, calls the book "radical, extreme, modern," and urges that it be read according to its own standards. The fact that the standards she attributes to it seem to me wrong does not diminish the truth of the statement.

the sensitive reader. For that reader the acceptance of ambiguity not only offers a way of dealing with the confusion and uncertainty of life, but also offers a vision of that confusion which renders it much less terrifying.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ See, for example, Alan Watts, The Wisdom of Insecurity (New York: Pantheon, 1951).

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APPENDIX

PLOT SUMMARY OF THE GOLDEN BOWL

The novel deals basically with two marriages; the scene is primarily London. A young woman, Maggie Verver, is American and very rich and her marriage is to an Italian Prince, Amerigo, at the beginning of the book. Adam Verver, her father, a millionaire and an art collector, marries the beautiful Charlotte Stant, a woman Maggie's age and her close friend since childhood, and a Europeanized American, some two years later. What is not revealed to Maggie and Adam, however, is that Amerigo and Charlotte were in love before the Prince met Maggie, but because neither had money and both required it, they could not marry.

For a while both marriages go on smoothly, Maggie producing a Principino in the meantime. Charlotte and the Prince, however, are thrown more and more together, due to Maggie's and Adam's preoccupation with each other and Maggie's baby. We see that the former's relationship is more than just friendship. Finally they go off together to a houseparty at Matcham, at the others' request, but when they return later than expected Maggie begins to have suspicions. She makes it clear to her husband and her step-mother that something is changed for her, but she brings nothing out into the open.

Maggie's suspicions are confirmed when she chances upon a golden bowl in a shop, that, on the eve of the Prince's marriage to Maggie the Prince and Charlotte visited together. The shopman, remembering the

previous occasion and seeing pictures of Charlotte and Amerigo in her house, tells her how they spoke together in endearments, wanted to buy presents for each other, and how Charlotte almost bought the golden bowl for Amerigo. In a climactic scene Mrs. Assingham, a well-meaning lady who has brought both couples together in spite of her knowledge of the Prince's past with Charlotte, smashes the bowl (which is not gold but gilded crystal--and flawed) into three pieces on the floor, but the Prince enters in time to see. Maggie then confronts him with her knowledge.

Maggie is intent on two things: getting her husband back and preventing her father from knowing anything. Adam, however, surprises everyone by deciding to take Charlotte to live in American City permanently. Because of this and because the Prince refuses to help her by telling her anything, she is in anguish but sufficiently recovers her composure by the end. Maggie and Amerigo entertain the older couple on the eve of their departure; after they are gone the Prince and the Princess have the conversation on which the book ends, of which this is the conclusion:

'Isn't she [Charlotte] too splendid?' she simply said, offering it to explain and to finish.

'Oh, splendid!'" With which he came over to her.

'That's our help, you see,' she added--to point further her moral.

It kept him before her therefore, taking in--or trying to--what she so wonderfully gave. He tried, too clearly, to please her--to meet her in her own way; but with the result only that, close to her, her face kept before him, his hands holding her shoulders, his whole act enclosing her, he presently echoed: "'See"? I see nothing but you.' And the truth of it had with this force after a moment so strangely lighted his eyes that as for pity and dread of them she buried her own in his breast. (XXIV, 368-69)